

Enhancing practice

Quality Enhancement Themes: The First Year Experience

Transition to and during the first year

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Ruth Whittaker

Preface

The approach to quality and standards in higher education (HE) in Scotland is enhancement led and learner centred. It was developed through a partnership of the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), Universities Scotland, the National Union of Students in Scotland (NUS Scotland) and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) Scotland. The Higher Education Academy has also joined that partnership. The Enhancement Themes are a key element of a five-part framework, which has been designed to provide an integrated approach to quality assurance and enhancement. The Enhancement Themes support learners and staff at all levels in further improving higher education in Scotland; they draw on developing innovative practice within the UK and internationally.

The five elements of the framework are:

- a comprehensive programme of subject-level reviews undertaken by higher education institutions (HEIs) themselves; guidance is published by the SFC (www.sfc.ac.uk)
- enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR), run by QAA Scotland (www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/ELIR)
- improved forms of public information about quality; guidance is provided by the SFC (www.sfc.ac.uk)
- a greater voice for students in institutional quality systems, supported by a national development service - student participation in quality scotland (sparqs) (www.sparqs.org.uk)
- a national programme of Enhancement Themes aimed at developing and sharing good practice to enhance the student learning experience, facilitated by QAA Scotland (www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk).

The topics for the Enhancement Themes are identified through consultation with the sector and implemented by steering committees whose members are drawn from the sector and the student body. The steering committees have the task of establishing a programme of development activities, which draw on national and international good practice. Publications emerging from each Theme are intended to provide important reference points for HEIs in the ongoing strategic enhancement of their teaching and learning provision. Full details of each Theme, its steering committee, the range of research and development activities as well as the outcomes are published on the Enhancement Themes website (www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk).

To further support the implementation and embedding of a quality enhancement culture within the sector - including taking forward the outcomes of the Enhancement Themes - an overarching committee, the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC), chaired by Professor Kenneth Miller, Vice-Principal, University of Strathclyde has, the important dual role of supporting the overall approach of the Enhancement Themes, including the five-year rolling plan, as well as institutional enhancement strategies and management of quality. SHEEC, working with the individual topic-based Enhancement Themes' steering committees, will continue to provide a powerful vehicle for progressing the enhancement-led approach to quality and standards in Scottish higher education.



Norman Sharp
Director, QAA Scotland

Contents

Acknowledgements	1
Executive summary	2
1 Introduction	2
2 Project approach	2
3 Summary overview of project findings	3
4 Approaches used or being developed to support transition	5
5 Summary of key features of effective transition support	5
6 Summary of recommendations on how support for transition can be enhanced	6
7 Summary of examples of practice	8
Part 1: Introduction, approach and overview	12
8 Introduction to the Transition project and structure of the report	12
9 Project approach	13
10 Overview of project findings	15
Part 2: Project findings	18
11 Key generic issues associated with transition to higher education	18
12 Specific issues associated with diversity	21
13 Approaches to supporting transition	25
14 Enhancing support for transition: policy discussion	43
Part 3: Conclusions and recommendations	53
15 Key features of effective transition support	53
16 How transition support can be enhanced to facilitate student engagement and empowerment in the first year: recommendations for policy and practice	55
Part 4: Case studies	59
17 Ten case studies	59
Case study 1: GOALS Top-Up Programme	61
Case study 2: Glasgow Caledonian University: 'Passion for Fashion' programme	64
Case study 3: UniSmart programme	67
Case study 4: Queen Margaret University: QM Advance and QMConnect mentoring project	69

Case study 5:	UHI Millennium Institute: Developing a longitudinal approach to induction	74
Case study 6:	Spirit of Creation: Student-focused extended journey mapping	80
Case study 7:	University of the West of Scotland, School of Computing: Proactive school-based support through a Student Liaison Officer and pair programming	86
Case study 8:	Napier University: First Year Experience - Issues in Health and Social Care module	88
Case study 9:	Glasgow Caledonian University, School of Nursing, Midwifery and Community Health: The Enhance programme	92
Case study 10:	University of Strathclyde, Strathclyde Business School: Management Development Programme	96
References		100
Appendices		104
18	Appendix 1: list of consultation meetings/events	104
19	Appendix 2: Quality Enhancement Themes First Year Experience reports	106

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Ruth Whittaker

Executive summary

I Introduction

The aim of this 'Transition to and during the first year' project was to consider the engagement and empowerment of students by investigating aspects of transition to the first year. The increasing diversity of higher education (HE) presents increasing challenges and opportunities in the area of transition. This diversity relates to:

- learner profile
- context of prior learning - school, college, workplace, community, education outside the United Kingdom (UK)
- HE provision:
 - learning, teaching and assessment strategies underpinning different programmes and discipline areas
 - flexibility of programmes in terms of place, pace, content and mode of learning.

The project has drawn on examples of effective and interesting practice within the Scottish, UK-wide and international HE sector to illustrate ways in which these challenges can be addressed. This report makes clear recommendations for ways in which support for transition to HE can be enhanced in order to facilitate student engagement and empowerment in the first year.

2 Project approach

Five key questions provided the framework within which this project was carried out:

- 1 What are the key generic issues associated with transition to HE?
- 2 What are the specific issues associated with different types of students (in terms of learner profile and prior learning context), particular modes of learning, particular subject areas and particular types of institution?
- 3 What approaches are being used or developed within institutions or in partnership with other organisations, such as schools, colleges and community-based learning providers, to tackle these issues, both pre- and post-entry?
- 4 What are the key features of effective approaches to supporting transition to the first year?
- 5 In what ways might higher education institutions (HEIs) enhance the support for transition to the first year in order to more effectively engage and empower students? What are the barriers to this and what support do HEIs need in effecting such changes?

A review of literature, web-based research and consultation with practitioners and policy-makers was undertaken to address these questions. This report considers the outcomes

of that process. Consultation with students on the first-year experience has been undertaken through the First Year Experience Enhancement Theme sector-wide exploration project, 'Student expectations, experiences and reflections on the first year'.

The findings from the transition project, which are summarised below, are an extrapolation of the key issues identified through the literature review, web-based research and consultation process. The complexity of transition and the range of different ways in which it can be supported are explored more fully throughout the report. Examples of practice are also contained within the report. A number of these have been developed as case studies, which are provided in Part 4.

Many of the issues and conclusions which have emerged from this project reiterate what is already known and understood within the Scottish HE sector about transition and how it can be supported. However, these issues do not only reflect what is already recognised in the sector - they also reflect current practice and emerging developments. This is illustrated in the examples of practice contained within the report and its case studies. The crucial importance of the first year experience and the value of effective transition, in terms of successful engagement, progression and achievement, are now widely acknowledged across the Scottish HE sector.

This report endeavours to consolidate the views and approaches that were highlighted during the literature review and consultation process. Some of the recommendations made in relation to enhancing transition support through change and innovation are being explored by many HEIs in Scotland. Institutions are actively engaged in discussion on the nature and purpose of the first year, and for many the issue of transition is now an area of key strategic importance, with associated strategic investment.

3 Summary overview of project findings

Transition to the first year requires not only support through a strategic and coordinated approach by HEIs, but support that starts well before entry to university and continues throughout the first semester and indeed the first year. Evaluation of the impact of strategies to support transition should be qualitative as well as quantitative and measured in terms of student achievement as well as student retention.

Transition support should not be extraneous to the mainstream activity of the institution, but integral to the learning experience. Hence, effective approaches to supporting transition depend on the proactive involvement of teaching staff and need to be embedded within programmes in terms of content as well as learning, teaching and assessment strategies.

Approaches to supporting transition are linked to improving preparedness for HE, easing integration into the university environment - both academically and socially - and encouraging the development of the independent learner.

Much of the research carried out on transition to the first year has been driven by issues of student retention and withdrawal. These, in turn, are linked to the impact on the teaching and learning experience of a mass HE system and the growing diversity of the student population.

Mass HE is continuing to change the nature of the university experience. The 'depersonalisation' associated with the mass experience of being a first-year student has an impact on all of these students, whether traditional or non-traditional. The mainstreaming of technologically-enhanced learning and the integrated use of technology for academic and social purposes have also significantly changed the student experience.

Diversity was a central theme in this project, and is a critical issue in terms of transition support. The increasing heterogeneity of the student population - including within different learner groups, in terms of prior educational experience, personal and work circumstances, attitudes to learning and motivation levels - requires a range of approaches and a flexible system of support. The question of what is an effective solution to problems associated with transition depends on the nature of a particular student group, in a particular programme, in a particular institution.

Academic and support services staff designing and operating transition strategies clearly must have an understanding of particular factors that are likely to have an impact on different learner groups. Institutions need to track, analyse and understand patterns of progression and retention, which will vary across the institution, across schools, faculties and departments and across programmes, in order to develop appropriate responses and approaches. Single solutions targeted at particular types of students are not sufficient. This will become increasingly crucial as the student population becomes more diverse. The maxim 'one size does not fit all' was echoed throughout the literature and in discussion with practitioners. In terms of promoting an enhancement rather than deficit approach to transition support¹, strategies should focus on recognising and building on the strengths, skills and knowledge that students bring into the university experience, regardless of their learner profile.

By shifting the focus of transition from the issue of student retention and withdrawal to one of supporting the engagement and empowerment of all students, successful transition will be measured not simply in terms of whether students continue on their programmes but, in doing so, are provided with the opportunity to achieve their full potential. A considerable proportion of students who do not withdraw but complete their studies may nevertheless have underperformed because of disengagement from educational and social processes of university life.

Effective approaches to transition support may require more major cultural, philosophical and pedagogical shifts regarding the nature and purpose of the first year. If the goal of the first year of university is to facilitate the engagement and empowerment of all students and equip them with the skills needed to successfully undertake subsequent stages of their programme, a radical reshaping of the first year may also be required. This may entail a rethinking of curricular structures, curricular content and learning and teaching strategies.

¹ See page 26 for a more extensive explanation of this approach.

4 Approaches used or being developed to support transition

Successful transition in terms of student engagement and empowerment:

- **coordinated institutional strategic approach**
- **pre-entry support** - informed choice, preparation, expectations
- **longitudinal approach to induction**, including **timely provision of information** to avoid information overload, and orientation that focuses on social integration
- focus on **social integration** - peer support networks
- **progressive skills development and personal development planning (PDP)** through programme modules and support services
- embedding transition support in **learning, teaching and assessment** strategies
- **proactive student support** - developing a sense of belonging
- **student control and choice.**

5 Summary of key features of effective transition support

These key features are explored in more detail in Section 15 of this report.

- **Coordinated institutional strategy:** university commitment evidenced through clear policy and appropriate resources, institutional 'home', evidence-based practice, greater investment in first year, recognition of pedagogy of first-year teaching, development of communities of practice, integration within an institution's business model as a core activity, and involvement of staff in this core activity rewarded through pay and progression.
- **Pre-entry support stage:** vital in terms of enabling informed choice and preparation for HE study through university-led support via websites, school and college liaison, campus visits, peer mentoring schemes and collaborative approaches with schools, colleges and the community.
- **Longitudinal process of induction** which begins from the point of application to end of first year and addresses social as well as academic integration.
- **Timely provision of information and guidance:** avoidance of overload; use of timeline or student journey to guide provision of information and guidance; recognition that students' needs change as they progress through the first year.
- **Mainstream teaching activity** should address multidimensional aspects of transition (academic, social and personal) in curriculum design, for example: social networking; early engagement with academic staff; collaborative and interactive activities; challenging, interconnected curriculum; formative feedback and formative assessment. Learning and teaching strategies should emphasise skills development and self-directed enquiry.
- **Explicit strategies for social transition**, such as the development of peer support networks within and outside the curriculum.
- **Progressive skills development** through PDP: integration of PDP, learning strategies, study skills and information literacies within subject-based provision.

- **Collaboration** between central support services and teaching staff, as well as library and information technology (IT) support staff and student representatives, to provide a comprehensive induction into higher education.
- **Student access to support in a range of formats:** should be viewed as part of normal activity rather than as a response to crisis, with signposting to support at critical periods and proactive personal tutoring.
- **Focus on an enhancement rather than a deficit model:** for learning support that values and builds on learning and skills achieved so far.
- **Understanding of particular transition issues** associated with different learner groups and different modes of learning, but avoiding generalisations based on learner profile.
- **Transition support targeted at all students**, not just those 'at risk', and measured not just in terms of retention but also whether students are equipped with the skills and disposition to achieve their full potential. 'It is those students who struggle quietly with the changes involved in entering HE who present the biggest and most subtle challenges for universities.' (Lowe and Cook, 2003).

6 Summary of recommendations on how support for transition can be enhanced

Consideration of the key features of effective transition through a review of the literature and the consultation process generated a number of ideas regarding the ways in which HEIs might make changes to their approach to transition support to engage and empower students more effectively. Many of these recommendations reflect existing good practice and emerging developments. The recommendations relate to policy and practice and are therefore directed at senior managers/policy-makers, academics/practitioners and student officers/student associations.

These recommendations are considered in more detail in Section 16 of the report.

At policy level:

- **Sector-wide collaboration** is required to agree threshold levels of transition support and development of good practice guidelines.
- The first year as an **area of policy and analysis** needs to have the same prominence within institutions as other policy areas, such as the research agenda, with **explicit senior management support**.
- **Strategic, coordinated institutional approaches** informed by research should be developed in order to ensure fundamental cross-institutional impact. This is likely to require changes to practice and culture, in terms of the university's pre-entry role, the nature of the curriculum and the nature of support services.
- The challenge of **staff engagement** should be addressed through establishing a sense of ownership, responsibility and recognition by staff of transition as a problem that needs to be solved; persuasion by example, supported by providing more effective processes that enable staff to showcase and share practice and approaches across institutions and develop communities of practice involving both academic

and support staff; supporting learning and teaching development through strategic funding; and building recognition of innovative approaches to first-year teaching into reward and career progression processes.

- A system of transition support should be **multilayered and flexible**, reflect **student-identified** (as opposed to institution-determined) requirements, and establish an appropriate balance between a **proactive approach** and **student choice and autonomy**.
- **Greater recognition of the strengths, skills and prior experience** of students entering their first year is needed, to ensure that transition support is predicated on an enhancement rather than deficit model, which recognises and builds on existing skills. PDP is clearly an effective means of promoting this approach.
- **Greater investment in the first year through frontloading of resources** is required, in terms of creating a supportive environment and a more learner-centred experience to ensure the successful transition of students into the next and subsequent years of programme.
- **Greater recognition of the pedagogy of first-year teaching** needs addressing in initial and continuing professional development, along with the valuing of staff engaged in first-year teaching and research and development work in this area.
- **Students' role as 'co-producers' of the university experience** rather than 'consumers' needs to be encouraged through learning and teaching policy and quality enhancement processes that use a range of different mechanisms for staff-student liaison, dialogue and partnership working.
- **Changing the pace and nature of the first year** is required to enable the development of metacognitive skills, learning strategies and core and reflective skills within the context of subject discipline. This would entail a rethinking of programme structures and curricular content as well as learning, teaching and assessment processes, within the context of an institutional discussion on the nature and purpose of the first year. The focus of a changed approach to the first year should be to equip students more effectively with the skills, learning behaviours and confidence to proceed successfully onto subsequent stages of their programme and achieve their full potential.

At practice level:

- **Improved communication between schools, colleges and universities:** better mutual understanding of generic transition issues and those specific to particular subjects is required.
- **Greater collaboration between schools, colleges, community learning providers and universities is needed in providing pre-entry support**, for example joint school/college/university programmes as well as university pre-sessional activities open to all new students.
- **Greater recognition of diversity as a critical issue in terms of transition support:** understanding is needed of the different needs, goals, motivations and expectations of students, which vary across the institution, across schools and faculties and across programmes.
- **More effective monitoring, tracking and student evaluation** are needed to enable swift follow-up and early intervention and to track educational pathways

and understand patterns of transition and progression and the student first-year experience. These processes include the use of institutional and programme data through student management information systems; monitoring mechanisms and the use of virtual learning environments (VLEs); qualitative evaluation; and willingness to share information across and between institutions. Proactive monitoring should not just focus on retention but also on performance.

- **Greater emphasis on formative assessment** is needed **early in the first semester**, as well as detailed feedback and tutorial support to clarify expectations and support adaptation to the university learning experience, and encourage 'risk-taking'.
- **Curriculum design** should have a **greater focus on the interactive dimensions of learning and the social experience** of students, for example working in small groups and more enquiry-based and project work. It should also provide a more **challenging learning experience** to encourage greater engagement and the development of independent learning and high-level critical skills.
- Institutions need to explore the most effective mechanisms for creating **better informal networks of learning and guidance**. Informal and social networking, peer support, peer mentoring and buddying systems play an important role in supporting both social and academic integration as well as student engagement and empowerment.
- **Greater sharing of intellectual control with students** is needed for the development of independent learning skills and personalised approaches in terms of content and mode.
- Students should be **empowered** through transition strategies which seek to help them achieve a **high level of self-efficacy** in terms of finance, accommodation, core and learning skills, understanding expectations and delivering accordingly. Proactive intervention should be developed and delivered in terms of the key competences required to succeed in the first year. Accessing support at timely points through the year should be in a format and at a stage that suits the student through the use of online resources and information, rather than relying on student support staff.

7 Summary of examples of practice

These examples are included throughout the report to illustrate issues and approaches. Some of them are also provided as case studies in Part 4.

- **GOALS (Greater Opportunities for Access and Learning with Schools) Top-Up Programme** - pre-entry preparation for students in schools with low HE participation rates. Programme equips pupils in S5 and S6 with skills needed to succeed in HE. Sessions in schools run by GOALS tutors and campus visits. www.goals.ac.uk **See case study.**
- **Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU), 'Passion for Fashion' programme** - gives S6 school pupils the experience of university education. Starts in the second week of the school term and lasts 28 weeks. Successful completion of assessments results in an award of achievement which gives participants exemption from a first-year module at GCU if accepted as a student on the BA (Hons) Fashion Marketing or BA (Hons) Marketing and Retailing. **See case study.**

- **SWAP (Scottish Wider Access Programme)** - long-running, successful programme targeted at adult returners and designed to prepare them for HE. Delivered in colleges, but involves collaborative development and delivery with HEIs.
- **Udecide, the Decision-making in Student Progression and Transition project** - West Forum project hosted by the University of Glasgow. Aimed to assist students in making appropriate educational decisions at key points in their lives and to improve the retention of students in HE from those areas and groups where HE participation was low. www.westforum.org.uk
- **University of the West of Scotland, First Steps modules** - pre-entry preparation for adult returners. Successful completion of these modules guarantees progression to further undergraduate study on a part-time basis. The modules are offered in the evening during both semesters, and during the university's Summer Programme. The use of student tutors, who facilitate the tutorial groups and act in the role of 'critical friend', is viewed as a key success factor.
- **E-Grow (Educational guidance to routes and opportunities)** - West Forum project which has produced a compendium of good practice centred on providing support and guidance prior to transition to college and university. Also a highly successful 'Parent's Guide to Surviving the College and University Transition'. www.westforum.org.uk
- **Trinity College website for new students** - to introduce them to the College prior to starting and prepare them for becoming a student at Trinity. Provides a week-by-week guide to information they will need at relevant points before starting at university and throughout the first semester. www.tcd.ie/orientation/index.php
- **UniSmart programme** - used in universities throughout New Zealand, Australia and the UK to support the personal transition of new students. Programme takes the form of a 75-minute dynamic presentation which encourages students to seek help early, opens minds and builds empathy for fellow students. www.unismart.biz
See case study.
- **Queen Margaret University, QM Advance** - three-day pre-induction course with a series of follow-on sessions in the first semester. Aims to 'assist identified groups of new students to make a smooth transition to university life and study'. Targeted at two specific groups: mature students and direct-entry students. Focuses on supporting new students to develop their knowledge, skills and confidence to help them become more effective learners. **See case study.**
- **UHI Millennium Institute (UHI), Developing a longitudinal approach to induction** (pre-entry, orientation, semester 1, semester 2) - a 'timeline' information strategy, coordinated institutional framework and institutional 'home' for transition (resources, policy, sharing of practice and material). **See case study.**
- **University of Strathclyde, Strathclyde Transition Framework** - to ensure that first years have a strong foundation for their university career. Coordinated institutional policy, development of a website for pre-entry guidance, first-year coordinators at departmental level, transition working groups at faculty level and development of models for curriculum design.

- **Spirit of Creation, student-focused extended journey mapping** - used by two universities in England to understand issues associated with transition, retention and progression from the student perspective. Data from this exercise have been used to change approaches to transition support in relation to practical, social and academic issues as part of strategic development. **See case study.**
- **University of Ulster, STAR (Student Transition and Retention) project** - has developed a set of guidelines as a checklist of activities that support the effective management of student transition to programmes and the university experience. www.ulster.ac.uk/star
- **University of Melbourne, comprehensive induction programme** - with separate resource section for university staff, including transition checklist for lecturers of first-year subjects. www.services.unimelb.edu.au/transition
- **University of Teesside, Retention Team** - established to research, understand and address student retention and develop effective transition strategies. Resource for staff in restructuring programmes at the university to more effectively support student success. www.tees.ac.uk/retention
- **University of Sydney, one-day workshop** - held before beginning of orientation period, it concentrates on the **development of social and academic networks**. Regular meetings of small groups throughout the first semester focus on benefits of peer networks and group student activities (social integration).
- **University of the West of Scotland, School of Computing, pair programming** - introduced to improve programming skills development among first-year Computer Science and Computer Games Technology students. Tutor feels that they worked harder, wasted less lab time (surfing, checking email etc) and got to know one another much more than in previous years. As a result, they are a more cohesive, socialised group than previous cohorts. **See case study.**
- **University of Dundee, Learning Centre - progressive skills development** through central support service, synchronised with critical periods, for example first assignment and credit-bearing module P@SS (Personal Academic Student Skills).
- **Napier University, First Year Experience Issues in Health and Social Care module** - transition into an HEI setting for adult returners. Focuses on engagement with the university learning process as well as learning outcomes within a large-group teaching model. **See case study.**
- **University of the West of Scotland, School of Computing** - has developed a proactive school-based support model for transition which centres on the role of the Student Liaison Officer (SLO). The SLO acts as a 'one-stop shop' for all students, whatever their difficulty. The SLO coordinates induction, the buddy scheme, attendance monitoring and resit support within the School. **See case study.**
- **GCU, School of Nursing, Midwifery and Community Health, Enhance Programme** - development of scholarship skills and academic and social integration through interactive student-focused activities and use of reflection as a tool for personal and professional development. **See case study.**

- **University of Strathclyde, Strathclyde Business School (SBS), Management Development Programme** - compulsory for all SBS students. Addresses key aspects of transition to first year. Centres on group teamwork activities, for which students receive regular feedback, and encourages peer support networks and friendship groups. Incorporates PDP as well as the development of employability skills, and benefits from employer engagement and sponsorship. **See case study.**
- **GCU, School of Built and Natural Environment, Vertical Project** - group project in which students from all four years of the programme work with each other; peer-supported learning and teaching process.
- **Queen Margaret University, QMConnect mentoring project** - managed centrally by the Transition and Pre-entry Guidance Adviser in Student Services. Project supports new undergraduate students (including direct entrants) during the transition period by matching them with more experienced students who have volunteered to offer peer support. **See case study.**
- **De Montfort University**, integration of preparation for HE study and development of study skills into a **PDP process** - students complete a workbook as first step of PDP process. This is viewed as the start of personal, academic and career development as a student at De Montfort: *Focus on your skills and experience. Working towards confident and independent study 2006/7* (Ply and Pillai, eds, 2006).
- **University of Strathclyde, Faculty of Education** - has piloted the use an e-portfolio, 'Pebblepad' (www.pebblepad.co.uk), to support PDP, in order to integrate PDP more coherently with the rest of the BEd first year. Has proved effective in supporting self-managed learning, self and peer assessment and interaction and dialogue with peers and tutors.
- **GCU, School of Built and Natural Environment, Professional Orientation and Practice module** - supports induction, IT skills, generic themes, discipline-specific workshops and PDP.
- **Cardiff University Students' Union** - has undertaken a strategic lead in transition support through **Project Q**. This has assessed the expectations and aspirations of all students entering Cardiff University, the experience of students while studying at Cardiff, and the views of former students who have left the university. The students' union and the university have worked together on the project to address these areas. Information gained from Project Q will be used to understand and enhance the student experience in different facets of student life.
www.cardiff.ac.uk/studx/project-q

Part I

8 Introduction to the Transition project and structure of the report

The aim of this practice-focused development project was to consider the engagement and empowerment of students by investigating aspects of transition to the first year. The increasing diversity of HE presents increasing challenges and opportunities in the area of transition. This diversity relates to:

- learner profile
- context of prior learning - school, college, workplace, community or education outside the UK
- HE provision:
 - learning, teaching and assessment strategies underpinning different programmes and discipline areas
 - flexibility of programmes in terms of place, pace, content and mode of learning.

The Transition project drew on examples of effective and interesting practice within the Scottish, UK-wide and international HE sector to illustrate ways in which these challenges can be addressed. Its approach was based on a review of literature, web-based research and consultation with practitioners and policy-makers.

This report on the project's findings makes clear recommendations for ways in which support for transition to higher education can be enhanced in order to facilitate student engagement and empowerment in the first year.

Structure of report:

Part 1 - Introduction, approach and overview

The project's approach is outlined, followed by a brief overview of the findings.

Part 2 - Project findings

- **Key generic issues** associated with transition to higher education.
- **Specific issues associated with diversity** - learner profile, different modes of learning, different subject areas and different types of institution.
- **Approaches to supporting transition** - a consideration of different approaches, followed by illustrative examples drawn from the literature review and consultation process.
- **Enhancing transition support** - ideas generated through discussion with policy-makers and senior academic staff which build on the issues and preliminary conclusions identified from the literature review and consultation with practitioners.

Part 3 - Conclusions and recommendations

- Conclusions on key features of effective transition support.
- Conclusions on ways in which transition support can be enhanced to facilitate student engagement and empowerment in the first year; recommendations for policy and practice.

Part 4 - Case studies

The case studies build on some of the examples of practice referred to within the report and illustrate key features of effective transition support.

9 Project approach

Five key questions provided the framework within which this project was undertaken:

- 1 What are the key generic issues associated with transition to higher education?
- 2 What are the specific issues associated with:
 - different types of students (in terms of learner profile and prior learning context)?
 - particular modes of learning?
 - particular subject areas?
 - particular types of institution?
- 3 What approaches are being used or developed within institutions or in partnership with other organisations, such as schools, colleges and community-based learning providers, to tackle these issues, both pre- and post-entry?
- 4 What are the key features of effective approaches to supporting transition to the first year?
- 5 In what ways might higher education institutions (HEIs) enhance the support for transition to the first year in order to more effectively engage and empower students? What are the barriers to this and what support do HEIs need in effecting such changes?

A 2006 comprehensive Higher Education Academy (HEA) literature review on the first year experience (Harvey, Drew and Smith) focused extensively on the issue of transition, and has since been supplemented with briefing papers on induction and integration. This literature review and the briefing papers are available on the HEA website (www.heacademy.ac.uk). It was therefore agreed that rather than replicating this process, it would be more productive for the Transition project to adopt a combined approach that sought to identify current thinking on the issue of transition identified through the literature, but also explored the issue through consultation with practitioners, senior managers and policy-makers.

The project's review of literature therefore used as its starting point the HEA literature review as well as work carried out as part of the Responding to Student Needs Enhancement Theme through the developmental project Responding to Student Needs, Student Evaluation and Feedback Toolkit which had a specific focus on the induction strand (QAA, 2005). The Responding to Student Needs project explored induction as the primary means of addressing difficulties associated with transition and assisting students in adapting to the HE environment. It identified theoretical models of transition, core strategies to assist in achieving integrated and coordinated transition planning, and examples of good practice from Australia, North America, New Zealand, Canada and Northern Ireland that incorporate these strategies.

The Transition project's review of literature looked at practice-based research, reports of development work and associated materials, as well as policy documents, to identify the major issues associated with transition, and interesting and useful approaches that are addressing these issues. The five key project questions formed the criteria for selecting the literature referred to in this report. Discussions with practitioners also highlighted useful and interesting resources and development work which are referred to in the report. The issue of diversity and its impact on transition is addressed within the literature, predominantly in relation to learner profile (traditional/non-traditional; younger/older students; full-time/part-time students). Subject-based issues in terms of transition emerged to some extent during discussion with practitioners, but did not feature greatly in the literature reviewed. This would appear to be an area meriting further research.

Web-based research was also undertaken to identify approaches and development work within HEIs and in schools and colleges. In addition, there were a number of consultation meetings and events with practitioners in Scotland to explore particular approaches, which formed the basis of case studies for the project. They included facilitation of workshops on transition at the HEA conference, 'Getting Engaged', in November 2006, the Enhancement Themes Conference in March 2007, and the Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning (CRL) International Conference in June 2007. A list of these consultation meetings and events is provided in Appendix 1.

Interviews with key figures in academic policy-making were also undertaken as part of the project. The purpose of these was to explore and build on the ideas that were emerging through the literature review and consultation with practitioners in relation to how HEIs might enhance support for transition to the first year to engage and empower students more effectively.

Consultation with students on the first year experience has been undertaken through the First Year Experience Enhancement Theme sector-wide exploration project, 'Student expectations, experiences and reflections on the first year'. Transition, in terms of the views and experiences of students, was one of the areas investigated in that exploration project.

This report summarises issues, approaches and examples of practice that focus on supporting transition to the first year. A number of case studies which provide a more in-depth exploration of some of these examples are contained in Part 4 of the report. They reflect key features of effective transition support.

Many of the issues and conclusions which have emerged from this project reiterate what is already known and understood within the Scottish HE sector about transition and how it can be supported. However, these issues do not only reflect what is already recognised in the sector - they also reflect current practice and emerging developments. This is illustrated in the examples of practice contained within the report and its case studies. The crucial importance of the first year experience and the value of effective transition, in terms of successful engagement, progression and achievement, are now widely acknowledged across the Scottish HE sector.

This report endeavours to consolidate the views and approaches which were highlighted during the literature review and consultation process. Some of the recommendations made in relation to enhancing transition support through change and innovation are being explored by many HEIs in Scotland. Institutions are actively engaged in discussion on the nature and purpose of the first year, and for many the issue of transition is now an area of key strategic importance, with associated strategic investment.

The work of the other First Year Experience Enhancement Theme projects clearly also informs issues and practice in relation to supporting transition to the first year:

Sector-wide discussion projects:

- sector-wide discussion: the nature and purposes of the first year
- student expectations, experiences and reflections on the first year.

Other practice-focused development projects:

- curriculum design for the first year
- transforming assessment and feedback: enhancing integration and empowerment in the first year
- peer support in the first year
- PDP in the first year
- personalisation of the first year
- introducing scholarship skills: academic writing.

The issues, approaches and case studies identified through these projects will also be a useful source of support and guidance for institutions at policy and practice level in addressing the issue of transition support. Many of the 'meta themes' which have emerged during institutional discussions on the nature and purpose of the first year (Gordon, 2007) are reflected in the approaches and key features of effective transition support identified in this report. The reports of the other First Year Experience projects are available on the Enhancement Themes website (www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk).

10 Overview of project findings

The findings summarised below are an extrapolation of the key issues identified through the literature review, web-based research and consultation process. The complexity of transition and the range of different ways in which it can be supported are explored more fully throughout the report.

The literature review and consultation with practitioners and policy-makers indicated that transition to the first year requires not only support through a strategic and coordinated approach by HEIs, but also that this support should start well before entry to university and continue throughout the first semester, and indeed the first year. Moreover, transition support should not be extraneous to the mainstream activity of the institution, but integral to the learning experience.

Hence effective approaches to supporting transition depend on the proactive involvement of teaching staff, and need to be embedded within programmes in terms of content; and learning, teaching and assessment strategies. Such approaches may require more major cultural, philosophical and pedagogical shifts regarding the nature and purpose of the first year. If the goal of the first year of university is to facilitate the engagement and empowerment of all students and to equip them with the skills needed to successfully undertake subsequent stages of their programme, a radical reshaping of the first year may also be required. This may entail a rethinking of curricular structures, curricular content and learning and teaching strategies.

Much of the research carried out on transition to the first year has been driven by issues of student retention and withdrawal. These, in turn, are linked to the impact on the teaching and learning experience of a mass HE system and the growing diversity of the student population (McInnis and James, 1995; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1998; Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003; Krause, 2003; Thomas et al, 2005). Mass higher education is continuing to change the nature of the university experience. The 'de-personalisation' associated with the mass experience of being a first-year student has an impact on all of these students, whether traditional or non-traditional. The mainstreaming of technologically-enhanced learning and the integrated use of technology for academic and social purposes has also significantly changed the student experience.

Approaches to supporting transition are linked to: improving preparedness for HE; easing integration into the university environment, both academically and socially; and encouraging the development of the independent learner. By shifting the focus of transition from student retention and withdrawal to supporting the engagement and empowerment of all students, successful transition can be measured not simply in terms of whether students continue on their programmes, but whether in doing so they are provided with the opportunity to achieve their full potential.

Diversity was a central theme in this project, and is a critical issue in terms of transition support. The increasing heterogeneity of the student population - including within different learner groups, in terms of prior educational experience, personal and work circumstances, attitudes to learning and motivation levels - requires a range of approaches and a flexible system of support. The question of what is an effective solution to problems associated with transition depends on the nature of a particular student group, in a particular programme, in a particular institution.

Academic and support services staff designing and operating transition strategies clearly must have an understanding of particular factors that are likely to have an impact on different learner groups. Institutions need to track, analyse and understand patterns of progression and retention, which will vary across the institution, across schools, faculties

and departments and across programmes, in order to develop appropriate responses and approaches. Staff, however, need to avoid generalising or stereotyping on the basis of gender, age, class, ethnicity, disability and so on, but instead need to understand the actual diversity of the student group, which is more complex than these factors alone.

Single solutions targeted at particular types of students are not sufficient. This will become increasingly crucial as the student population becomes more diverse. The maxim 'one size does not fit all' was echoed throughout the literature and in discussion with practitioners. Evans (2000) highlighted that particular types of students, in terms of age, background and disposition, experience different transition needs depending on the nature of both the institution they attend and the student body as a whole. In terms of promoting an enhancement rather than deficit approach to transition support, strategies should focus on recognising and building on the strengths, skills and knowledge that students bring into the university experience, regardless of their learner profile.

Part 2

11 Key generic issues associated with transition to higher education

This section explores: generic issues associated with transition to HE within the context of integration; the principal forms of transition; the changing nature of the university experience; academic transition through adapting to the university experience; personal and social transition; geographic and administrative transition; and the student perspective on transition.

11.1 Transition and integration

Theoretical models of transition have tended to be dominated by Tinto's theory of student integration (Evans, 2000; QAA, 2005; Harvey, Drew and Smith, 2006). Retention and progression are viewed as being largely determined by the student's ability to integrate into the academic and social aspects of university life. To achieve full integration, students need to successfully negotiate three phases: separation (from their previous environment); transition (adjustment to their new environment); and incorporation (full integration and acceptance of, and by, their new environment) (Tinto, 1987). Tinto's theory was predicated on traditional campus-based university experience in the US, rather than the heterogeneous nature of the student population and student experience in the mass HE system of the twenty-first century. The nature of this experience is affected by a range of social, personal and economic factors which lie outside the control of the university. The university can only endeavour to 'bend the odds in favour of student success' (Yorke, 2007). However, the concept of integration persists when exploring the issue of transition. Lack of preparation and wrong choice of course or institution can hinder successful integration (Ozga and Sukhmandan, 1997; Yorke and Longden, 2007), as can lack of interaction - both social and academic - with other students and academic staff (Krause, 2001).

11.2 Principal forms of transition

The four principal areas of transition to the first year at university are generally perceived to be: academic; personal and social; geographic; and administrative (McInnis, James and Hartley, 2000). The identification of these areas was informed by early survey work carried out by Williams and Pepe (1983) on the first year experience in Australian universities. They identified 'academic involvement', 'goal direction', 'classroom interaction', 'institutional belongingness', 'alienation' and 'social isolation' as the key environmental and motivational factors affecting students.

11.3 Changing nature of the university experience

Mass higher education, both within the UK and internationally, is continuing to change the nature of the university experience. The 'de-personalisation' (Thomas and Hixenbaugh, 2006) caused by greater class sizes, for example, and the lack of individual attention and support have an impact on all students, whether traditional or non-traditional. The 'massification' of HE is also generating a set of diverse needs, goals and

expectations of an increasingly heterogeneous student population (Thomas et al, 2005). Harvey, Drew and Smith (2006) highlighted in their conclusions that the issues surrounding the 'mass experience of being a first year as opposed to the differentiated experience of later years' required further investigation in order to support transition into the first year. The mainstreaming of technologically-enhanced learning and the integrated use of technology for academic and social purposes have also significantly changed the student experience (Creanor et al, 2006).

11.4 Academic transition: adapting to the university experience

Issues surrounding academic transition identified in the literature and through the discussions with practitioners focus on the student's need to adapt to styles of teaching and learning that are different from their prior educational experiences at school, college or community-based learning. A new level of independence is both required and expected of them by academic staff. Lowe and Cook (2003) highlighted that the study habits formed by students in secondary school, for example, persist until the end of the first semester, indicating that students are not bridging the gap between school and university quickly or effectively. The pace and volume of work may be higher than expected or previously experienced, and marks may be lower because of the different grading structures at university.

Harvey, Drew and Smith (2006) referred to research which indicates that the first year involves significant cognitive growth and the development of learning behaviour. They pointed out that this conceptual development can be hindered by prior conceptions of approaches to learning, and that teaching staff need to address whether the learning and teaching styles employed in their programmes aid this development. Katanis (2000) argued that traditional academic staff - and indeed many new staff who initially base their teaching approach on the way in which they were taught - view teaching a subject and teaching students as synonymous activities, and have not made the cultural and philosophical shift necessary to recognise and use 'the nexus between teaching and learning'.

The apparent connection between the success of surface learning techniques and assessment results in the first year, however, does not reflect the expectation of teaching staff that first years develop and use autonomous and deep approaches to learning. Adjustment is required not only to different expectations and experiences of teaching and learning, but also to the new academic discourse and culture associated with university. Programmes to support the professional development of new academic staff explicitly address such issues. A 2006 survey of such programmes by The Open University suggested that their impact will be realised in terms of effective approaches to learning, teaching and assessment when their participants begin to take a significant role in curricular review and design (Knight, 2006).

11.5 Personal and social transition

Social and personal transition is highlighted in the literature and featured in the discussions with practitioners as an important dimension in terms of retention and progression. Universities are increasingly developing approaches to address this issue explicitly, ideally through combined social and academic activities. Establishing friendship groups, as well as a sense of belonging to the university

programme and peer group, is viewed as essential in aiding personal and social adjustment to university life (Harvey, Drew and Smith 2006; Thomas, 2002; Katanis 2000; Yorke and Longden, 2007).

Younger students are also dealing with the emotional challenge of making the transition from adolescence to adulthood, and of taking responsibility for their academic and personal life. Feelings of isolation may be generated by the lack of familiar support networks. Students who are home-based rather than campus-based can experience greater difficulty in establishing friendship networks at university and integrating into campus life since they are likely to be less involved in university-based social or extracurricular activities (Lowe and Cook, 2003). However, students often just need the opportunity to share and discuss issues and concerns with their peers rather than seeking the services of professional support staff.

Developing skills of time management and finding a balance between social life, study, part-time work, family and managing finances become essential when adjusting to the university experience. The impact that employment while studying has on engagement and motivation is highlighted in the literature and also featured in the project's discussions with practitioners. McInnis (2001) argued for a major reassessment of research questions on the way in which university life fits in with the personal lives of students. Researching the student experience has tended to focus on the areas that academics consider the main factors in successful transition. McInnis contended that greater research needs to be undertaken on the relative importance of these factors to students themselves. This is vital if institutions are to target support in areas that will have meaningful impact on the first-year experience of students.

11.6 Geographic and administrative transition

Issues associated with geographic transition are linked to the potentially alienating and overwhelming impact of large campuses and high volumes of students. They are particularly relevant to students who are living away from home and coping with geographical adjustment to new living arrangements, a new city or a new country. Administrative transition centres on issues surrounding enrolment, managing timetables, keeping track of information and submission due dates, and maintaining contact with academic staff.

11.7 The student perspective on transition

The First Year Experience Enhancement Theme sector-wide discussion project 'Student expectations, experiences and reflections on the first year' met with undergraduates from a range of disciplines in Scottish HEIs to investigate their views on transition in terms of their expectations and experiences. The project explored how students' engagement and empowerment can be encouraged by gaining a clearer understanding of their expectations and experiences of the first year in Scottish HE.

The growing diversity of the student population requires institutions to develop and operate strategies that address these generic issues as well as those which are specific to different types of learner group. As Harvey, Drew and Smith (2006) concluded from their literature review, 'there is no first-year experience; there is a multiplicity of first-year experiences'.

12 Specific issues associated with diversity

This section considers transition issues that may be linked to different learner groups, modes of learning, subject areas and types of institution. In terms of learner profile, increasing student heterogeneity and factors impacting on the transition of different learner groups are considered. The need to understand the actual diversity of the student population and avoid generalisations and single-solution strategies is highlighted.

12.1 Learner profile

12.1.1 Increasing student heterogeneity

The increasing heterogeneity of the student population, especially the growth in numbers of mature students (adult returners; people in employment undertaking part-time study through campus-based, work-based, distance and blended approaches to learning) is arguably beginning to render outmoded the concept of the 'non-traditional' student. However, this term is still prevalent in academic and political discourse, and is used in this report to indicate students who have not traditionally participated in HE for reason(s) of socio-economic background, age, prior educational background, ethnicity, nationality or disability. Widening participation strategies have increased the numbers of students with non-traditional learner profiles who may be unfamiliar with or unprepared for traditional university learning, teaching and assessment methods (Thomas et al, 2005; Harvey, Drew and Smith, 2006).

12.1.2 Factors impacting on the transition of different learner groups

In terms of social transition, research undertaken by student evaluation projects (for example, by the Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning [CRLL]) has indicated that working-class, first-generation and mature students tend to have less peer support to draw on (Toman and Caldwell, 2006). Mature students tend to rely more on interaction with their tutors to gain support and advice in relation to their study than do younger students, who prefer to seek initial advice and support from their peers. Younger students tend to require immediacy in addressing academic issues, which is generally more readily available from their peers, even if not necessarily the best source of guidance. Consultation meetings with practitioners also highlighted the lack of confidence often experienced by mature students, as well as their perception of their 'right' to be at university. Mature students work hard and are highly motivated, but tend to worry more about their performance than do younger students (Toman and Caldwell, 2006).

First-generation students may have expectations of higher education and the support they will receive which are not realised. Yorke (2000) highlighted that mature students entering HE from an access course, with its personalised and supportive environment, can experience crisis within the comparatively detached environment of university and the apparent unsupportiveness of staff.

Yorke (1998) demonstrated the importance of the gender factor as a determinant of success. Men are more likely than women to report experiencing difficulties with study issues, such as lack of study skills, poor commitment to study, difficulties with academic study and lack of academic progress.

International students, in addition to the challenges associated with social and geographic transition, also need to adapt to a different educational culture and approaches to learning and assessment. Concepts such as plagiarism, for example, may not be readily understood.

People with disabilities can often be disengaged from mainstream forms of transition support, such as personal tutoring, because of the provision of specialist learning support (for instance, dyslexia support). In other words, their disability becomes the primary focus of support, rather than other issues associated with making a successful transition to the first year. Moreover, Bolt (2004) highlighted that many university websites, which are the first point of contact for many prospective students, refer directly to gender, sexuality, class and ethnicity but not to disability, and argued that 'extrinsic or extraneous consideration does not constitute inclusion'.

12.1.3 Understanding the actual diversity of the student population and avoiding generalisations and single-solution strategies

Academic and support services staff designing and operating transition strategies clearly need to have an understanding of particular factors that are likely to have an impact on different learner groups. However, staff need to avoid generalising or stereotyping on the basis of gender, age, educational background, class, ethnicity, disability, and so on. Instead, they must understand the **actual** diversity of the student group, which is more complex than these factors alone. Single solutions targeted at particular types of students are not sufficient. This will become increasingly crucial as the student population becomes more diverse.

While recognising the importance of the specific needs of particular student groups in transition support, there is a danger that institutional strategies may define and relate to students as members of their particular target group, when students themselves would rather be defined as members of the wider university learning community (McInnis, 2001).

Indeed, Yorke and Longden's most recent survey (2007) of the first year experience for the HEA has suggested that students from widening participation backgrounds experience HE in much the same way as those from more traditional backgrounds. The HEA student survey, which took place between February and March 2006, explored different aspects of the first year experience across a range of different subjects in 23 institutions. Survey responses indicated that the more 'risk factors' in a student's experience, the higher the probability that the student will have considered withdrawing from the course. Financing concerns and lack of good information about the programme or the institution were highlighted as the main influencing factors in decisions to leave. However, Yorke and Longden did not identify any significant differences in terms of the student experience in relation to gender or socio-economic background, or whether the student was the first to go to university from their family. This suggests that any radical changes to the first year to improve students' engagement and empowerment should be targeted at all students, and not just those in 'at risk' or non-traditional groups.

12.2 Mode of learning

The impact of different modes of learning on the transition to university is briefly considered, with specific reference to the compacted delivery model of modular-based

programmes, workplace learning, work-based learning, technology-enhanced learning, and distance learning online programmes.

12.2.1 Modular-based programmes

The issue of the more compacted delivery model necessitated by modular-based programmes has been identified as a barrier in promoting student engagement through assessment strategies. Yorke (2000) pointed to the lack of short formative assessments within modularised programmes because of the need for module completion within a semester, and the subsequent danger of ‘failing and trailing’ modules early on. Such early failure, as Yorke pointed out, can be a major disincentive to continue on a programme, and suggests that the first year at university should perhaps focus on developing the skills required for success in subsequent years of the programme. This would entail fewer summative assessments and greater formative assessment and tutorial support. Strategies such as the introduction of ‘long, thin’ modules undertaken over the course of two semesters might support such developments.

12.2.2 Workplace learning

Students engaged in workplace learning (for example, nursing students) can initially find the dual identity of employee and student overwhelming. Placements are often regarded as the best aspect of a programme, but connections between university and the workplace need to be reinforced, for example by seminars midway through the placement. A sense of belonging needs to be generated in students even if they spend large amounts of time away from the campus.

12.2.3 Work-based learning

Work-based learning programmes necessitate, in particular, the development of reflective skills. This is challenging for all students, and particularly for those who may have been out of the education system for some time. Expectations of the role of the lecturer in work-based learning programmes can also initially create tensions in the relationship between students and staff. Students are required to shift their perception of the tutor from that of a teacher to a ‘facilitator’ of learning in supporting them in developing the reflective skills needed to learn from their experience.

Work-based learning students do not have the same ease of access to academic support and student services as full-time, campus-based students. More flexibility in provision of support - such as evening access to support services, workplace visits by university staff, email guidance - is required for students who are predominantly based off-campus. Universities also need to acknowledge that sometimes their programme takes second place to a student's other priorities in terms of work or family commitments.

12.2.4 Technology-enhanced learning

E-learning approaches require the transition to a different mode of learning for school leavers and mature students alike, whether for predominantly campus-based or distance-based learning. Students need to adjust to the technological environment, which integrates online technology through VLEs with the use of personal technologies and interaction with staff and fellow students through this medium. An assumption is often made that younger students will have highly developed information and

communication technologies (ICT) and information literacy (i-literacy) skills, which will make this transition smoother. However, many students from school need support in developing ICT and i-literacy skills, as well as adult learners. Indeed the workplace, rather than school, is a more likely source of ICT and i-literacy skills development.

12.2.5 Distance learning online programmes

Harvey, Drew and Smith (2006) referred to research carried out by Parkinson and Forrester (2004), which explored the induction experiences of students starting three different distance learning online programmes. They used gap analysis to determine whether there were differences between student experiences and perception, and from their findings provided guidance for planning induction sessions for distance-learning students. This included the use of a blended approach to learning and teaching, with a significant element of active student participation; pre-course diagnosis of students' IT skills; endeavouring to develop social cohesion within the group and establish the foundation of a peer support network; and facilitating a sense of belonging to both the programme and the university. Adjustments were made to the programmes, and the gap between student experiences and perceptions narrowed.

12.3 Subject

The impact of subject on transition is briefly considered, specifically in terms of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary programmes; the different starting points of students embarking on a subject; the level of maths skills; and the differences in learning and teaching approaches and assessment processes between school-based and university programmes in some subject areas.

12.3.1 Interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary programmes

The interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary nature of many programmes requires students to deal with differences in culture and styles of teaching and assessment when programme modules are drawn from different faculties, schools or departments. The challenge of adapting to academic discourse and expectations becomes more challenging for students on these types of programmes, as does instilling a sense of belonging and social cohesion.

12.3.2 Different starting points of students within a subject

The different starting points of students embarking on first-year programmes was highlighted as an issue in discussion with practitioners. As a result, some programmes - particularly in the field of science - are viewed as repetitive and insufficiently challenging for students who have completed Advanced Highers or A-Levels. Lecturers dealing with a range of pre-entry qualifications are often required to teach to the lowest common denominator to ensure that the requisite knowledge and skills are achieved by all. Lack of engagement can lead to lack of studying, failure and withdrawal. Such students need to be supported in developing the ability to identify and reflect on new learning alongside prior learning, perhaps through a greater emphasis on enquiry and discovery approaches to learning (Toman and Caldwell, 2006; First Year Symposium discussion, University of Strathclyde).

12.3.3 Level of maths skills

The issue of the level of first-years' maths skills (for example, in science and engineering, economics, business and geography programmes) was raised during discussion with practitioners and policy-makers. The nature of preparation and level of maths skills is often uneven in a cohort and requires a diagnostic approach towards targeting additional support appropriately.

12.3.4 Differences in learning and teaching approaches and assessment processes between school-based and university programmes

These differences were highlighted regarding particular subject areas, such as English, history, geography, science, computing and modern languages. The HEA Subject Centre Network website provides examples of a range of interesting approaches to dealing with the issue of transition support within particular subject areas (www.heacademy.ac.uk).

12.4 Institution

The impact on transition of different types of institution is briefly considered.

Post-1992 universities tend to respond more effectively to meet the needs of non-traditional students (Scheutz and Slowey, 2002) and appear to present fewer issues of social alienation for non-traditional students compared with pre-1992 institutions. Non-traditional students tend not to be isolated as individuals, but isolated as a group; there are more 'fish out of water' than 'fish in water' students at post-1992 universities. Lecturers tend to be viewed as more friendly, approachable and student-centred at post-1992 institutions (discussion with practitioners: Scottish Wider Access Programme [SWAP]; Greater Opportunities for Access to Learning for Schools [GOALS]; and also Toman and Caldwell, 2006). Evans (2000) highlighted that particular types of students, in terms of age, background and disposition, experience different transition needs depending on the nature of both the institution they attend and the student body as a whole.

13 Approaches to supporting transition

This section considers the different approaches to supporting transition. It highlights the need to: support the transition of all students, not just those 'at risk'; address transition support through visible and timely support services, accessed by all students as part of their normal experience and not just at times of crisis; support transition through social networks; and support transition through curriculum design and programme delivery.

13.1 Effective transition support

Aspects of effective transition support highlighted in Harvey, Drew and Smith's literature review (2006) and in other literature on the first year experience, as well as in the consultations with practitioners include:

- peer support networks (McInnis, James and Smith, 1995)
- effective personal tutoring systems (Thomas and Hixenbaugh, 2006)
- recognition of the diverse needs of students in induction

- viewing induction as a longitudinal process rather than an event
- integrating transition support within curriculum design and delivery
- greater use of team-working early on to encourage social interaction within an academic context
- mutual understanding and explicit sharing of expectations by students and teaching staff
- working collaboratively with students to help them develop the enabling, transferable skills that will make them effective learners in a university environment.

13.1.1 Supporting the transition of all students, not just those 'at risk'

The link between successful transition and student retention which dominates the literature has tended to lead to an approach to transition support predicated on a deficit model - that is, addressing the needs of 'at risk' students and/or focusing on the difficulties associated with adapting to the university environment (Harvey, Drew and Smith, 2006). 'At risk' students are more likely to be perceived to be non-traditional students in terms of socio-economic background and/or prior educational context or experience. However, if the concept of successful transition is measured in terms of the engagement and empowerment of all students, a shift to a model based on 'enhancement' - which values and builds on existing strengths, skills and knowledge regardless of learner profile - is necessary.

Failure to integrate successfully both academically and socially should not just be measured in terms of student withdrawal, but also in terms of whether the intellectual and personal goals of students have been fully achieved. Lowe and Cook (2003) argued that a considerable proportion of students who do not withdraw but complete their studies may nevertheless have underperformed because of disengagement from the educational and social processes of university life: 'It is those students who struggle quietly with the changes involved in entering HE who present the biggest and most subtle challenges for universities' (Lowe and Cook, 2003). They identified lack of preparation for HE from previous educational backgrounds as a key cause of this disengagement, but also the fact that many teaching staff have not altered their learning and teaching strategies to emphasise the importance of skills development or self-directed enquiry (Krause, 2001; Lowe and Cook, 2003; Katanis, 2000).

13.1.2 Visible and timely support services, accessed by all students as part of their normal experience and not just at times of crisis

Support services need to be visible and 'normalised', so that accessing them is seen by all students as part of their normal experience, rather than as a response to 'failure' or crisis. Visible signposts to this support at appropriate times of the semester, in response to a student experience 'timeline', via student diaries, planners, VLEs or lectures and seminars would enhance such de-stigmatisation of learning support (Toman and Caldwell, 2006). This should enable earlier intervention and improved communication before an issue develops into a crisis. It is also important to recognise, however, that intervention may not necessarily lead to a satisfactory resolution if a student's experience of the first year is problematic. There are many variables in terms of student experience, attitude and behaviour that lie beyond institutional control. Nonetheless, intervention can improve the chances of successful engagement.

13.1.3 Supporting transition through social networks

Active involvement in learning communities through the development of social networks within and outside the classroom has been argued by Katanis (2000) as a highly successful strategy in facilitating academic and social transition. The establishment of learning communities and peer support is increasingly being enhanced through the development of virtual communities through VLEs (Krause, 2003) and the use of personal technologies (Creanor et al, 2006).

13.1.4 Transition support through curriculum design and programme delivery

Transition support is increasingly being tackled within curriculum design and programme delivery. Academic as well as social integration is being addressed through a more holistic, longitudinal approach to induction that makes greater use of enquiry, discovery and team and small-group working. Good practice now tends to be identified as the integration of personal development planning, learning strategies, study skills and information literacies within subject-based modules. Group activity to enhance staff and peer interaction based, for example, on support for writing the first essay (Krause, 2001) is a key strategy in supporting academic transition.

The need for improved communication and cross-institutional working has been highlighted in the literature review and featured in the consultation with practitioners. Staff from admissions and student services, library staff, IT support staff, student association representatives and academic staff all need to work together to provide a comprehensive induction into HE (Campbell, 2006; Krause, 2003).

A number of approaches identified through the literature review, web-based research and discussion with practitioners support the engagement and empowerment of students at various stages of the transition continuum from pre-entry to the end of the first year. Examples of practice are provided below to illustrate these approaches; some of them have been developed further as case studies (see Part 4).

13.2 Approaches used or being developed to support transition

Successful transition in terms of student engagement and empowerment:

- **coordinated approach to institutional strategies**
- **pre-entry support** - informed choice, preparation, expectations
- **longitudinal approach to induction**, including **timely provision of information** to avoid information overload, and **orientation** that focuses on social integration
- focus on **social integration** - peer support networks
- **progressive skills development and PDP** through programme modules and support services
- embedding transition support in **learning, teaching and assessment** strategies
- **proactive student support** - developing a sense of belonging
- **student control and choice.**

Examples of practice drawn from the literature review and consultation process to illustrate different approaches to transition support are provided overleaf.

13.2.1 Coordinated approach to institutional transition strategies

Krause (2003) developed a framework mapping how first-year initiatives have developed in Australia (see figure 1). This continuum model was also cited in the Responding to Student Needs student evaluation and feedback toolkit (QAA, 2005). The induction strand contained in the QAA's report highlighted a number of interesting case studies of coordinated institutional approaches to supporting transition. These included Deakin University and its formation of a First Year Initiative Action Team and the appointment of a First Year Coordinator who was a senior academic, to ensure that transition support was placed high on the policy agenda (QAA, 2005).

Campbell and Morrison (2007) used Krause's model to identify the way in which recognition of the importance of an integrated strategic approach to induction has developed within the UHI Millennium Institute (UHI) to date, and to indicate how the process of change can continue.

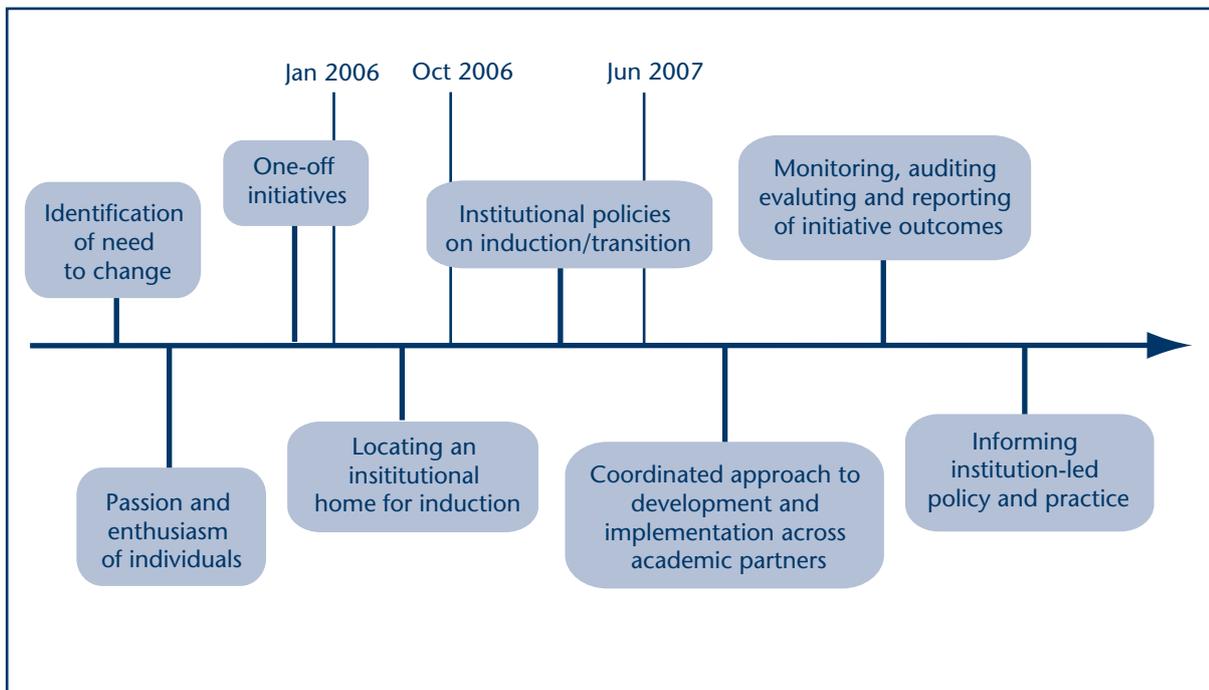


Figure 1: continuum model of the development of first-year initiatives (adapted from Krause, 2003).

The need for an 'institutional home' for induction and first-year initiatives, to coordinate, monitor and review activities across the institution and encourage sharing of good practice, was specified in this model. Such a home requires power - to initiate change, drive policy and allocate a budget. In this way, Campbell and Morrison argued, transition programmes should become part of mainstream institutional policy. This is especially critical in a multi-campus institutional context such as UHI, where the issue of equity is particularly challenging (see case study in Part 4).

The University of Strathclyde has instituted a **Strathclyde Transition Framework**, as part of its Academic Strategy Action Plan, to ensure that first-year students are provided with a strong foundation for their university career. It includes the development of a website

for prospective and first-year students, to provide pre- and post-arrival information, advice and support; the introduction of First Year Coordinators at departmental level; the introduction of transition working groups at faculty level; and the construction of models of programme design, assessment and support in the first year which support development of the skills and approaches necessary for independent and lifelong learning (University of Strathclyde, 2006). This framework was developed through an extensive consultation process across the university, and reflects the recognition within the university of the first year as an important area of policy and analysis. Its implementation is being supported through strategic funding. First Year Symposiums provide an opportunity for staff engaged in developing and implementing approaches to transition support across the faculties to discuss and share experience and progress.

The company **Spirit of Creation** (SoC) works with universities to apply the principles of service design in order to understand and improve the student experience. As part of a service design process, the company uses **student-focused extended journey mapping** based on the 'extended customer journey' mapping technique. Two universities in England have used SoC's service design tool-sets to establish users' needs, generate fresh ideas and qualify those ideas with the best potential outcome. The aim was to develop a programme for transformation backed by a rigorous business case (including new performance metrics for services), combined with an implementable blueprint for redesigned or innovative services to meet the evolving need in all education for:

- more successful transitions between educational strata and between years
- new peer-group learning to assist transitions and progression
- better designed employer engagement and employability
- better retention and completion ratios
- improved returns on funding, at individual and institutional level
- a shift from a 'deficit' to an 'enhancement' model.

The data from this exercise was used to change existing approaches to transition support in relation to practical, social and academic issues as part of strategic development (see case study in Part 4).

The **Retention Team** at the **University of Teesside** has been established to research, understand and address student retention and develop effective strategies to support students' successful transition through university. The team has been a resource for schools, programme teams and individual staff during the restructuring of programmes at the university. It has assisted in designing strategies that more effectively support student success (www.tees.ac.uk/retention).

The **STAR (Student Transition and Retention) project** at the University of Ulster developed a set of guidelines as a checklist of activities that support the effective management of student transition to programmes and the university experience. The guidelines cover 'Prior to Entry', 'Induction and Beyond', 'Curriculum Development', and 'Staff Development' (Cook et al, 2005) (www.ulster.ac.uk/star).

Krause (2003) identified three strategies to assist in achieving the goal of informing policy and practice at institutional level:

- 1 *Coordinate* first-year support efforts within institutions, which should be developed, implemented and evaluated within a coherent framework.
- 2 *Communicate* with relevant stakeholders regarding the success of first-year initiatives and future plans. Stakeholders include institutional administrators; academic staff; school, college and industry representatives; and students.
- 3 *Connect* with first-year students and the issues they face and the changes taking place in their experience. Equally, students need to engage in effective communication with the university community to clarify expectations of them as students in HE.

In terms of enhancing student engagement with learning, Krause (2007) proposed five strategies:

- 1 Build a community and a sense of belonging in your institution.
- 2 Develop responsive curricula.
- 3 Use assessment and feedback as tools for engagement.
- 4 Harness the possibilities of online, mobile and wireless technologies.
- 5 Engage students with the opportunities of 'future learning'.

The paper that explored these strategies is available at: www.griffith.edu.au/centre/gihe

13.2.2 Pre-entry support

Transition support needs to start before entry, rather than at the point of entry, and indeed should even begin prior to the decision to apply to university. Work in relation to the **GOALS** (Greater Opportunities for Access to Learning for Schools) project, for example, has suggested that preconceptions of university and whether it is a feasible or desirable option for individuals are developed at a very early age and need to be addressed within primary schools.

The GOALS management team commissioned the University of Strathclyde to undertake a survey on the attitudes of P6 children to further and higher education. These children were in primary schools associated with secondary schools that had low HE participation rates (Soden and Seagraves, 2006). The study suggested a paradoxical attitude to higher education. While non-traditional students by the end of secondary school tend to prefer to apply to college rather than university, the survey indicated that at an earlier age, within primary school, non-traditional students demonstrate greater aspirations for participation in a university education (rather than college) as a route into an interesting and well-paid job (Soden and Seagraves, 2006). The need to break down cultural barriers to participating in university clearly has to start at an early age.

The GOALS project aims to increase participation in higher education by pupils from schools with traditionally low HE participation. **GOALS Top-Up programmes** have been designed to ease the transition from school to HE by equipping school students in S5 and S6 with the skills they need to succeed in HE. The cultural, academic and institutional barriers facing students from GOALS-participating schools have been

explicitly addressed in the Top-Up Programme. The programme is run by GOALS tutors and covers note-taking, deconstructing questions, time management, reading and discussing academic texts, and campus visits. It also includes an assessed research project.

GOALS students who have taken part in the Top-Up Programme and agreed to participate in the West Forum (West of Scotland Wider Access Forum) GOALS Students in Transition tracking project have provided positive feedback. They considered that they had accurate expectations regarding the management of their time, what to expect in lectures and in terms of their workload. The Top-Up approach appears to be an effective strategy for managing transition from schools to college and university, and can provide students with a good head start (see case study in Part 4 for further details). A Summer Academy is also run for school pupils at the Universities of Strathclyde and the West of Scotland; it includes spending time at university doing research and being tutored by students.

Similarly, **LEAPS** (Lothians Equal Access Programme for Schools) aims to increase HE participation among students from non-traditional backgrounds through a programme that includes a pre-application interview and enquiry service, school- and university-based events and an eight-week summer school for school leavers. Through LEAPS, individualised support has been given to more than 1,000 school students each year and group support to at least another 1,000 students. LEAPS works with guidance staff in all 46 state secondary schools in Edinburgh and the Lothians to identify students who may be entitled to participate in LEAPS activities. A student identified as being eligible for LEAPS will have an academic ability appropriate to higher education, but their ability to fulfil their potential at school may have been affected by adverse social circumstances (www.leapsonline.org).

The '**Passion for Fashion**' Fashion Brand Retailing programme at Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) gives S6 school pupils an experience of university education which starts in the second week of the school term and lasts for 28 weeks. Successful completion of assessments results in an award of credit at SCQF (Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework) level 7, which gives the pupils exemption from a first-year module at GCU if they are accepted on the BA (Hons) Fashion Marketing or BA (Hons) Marketing and Retailing. School pupils have found this a challenging and engaging learning experience, enjoyed the experience of being on a university campus, and considered that the skills developed have given them a good preparation for university-level learning. University staff and the pupils' teachers have noted a significant increase in pupils' maturity as they have progressed through the programme (see case study in Part 4 for further details).

Other pre-entry support activities such as summer schools operate at many universities to help students to meet conditions of entry and/or provide an insight into what studying at university is like. A number of specialised initiatives offered within faculties and schools within universities are also designed to support entry into particular subject areas.

A collaborative programme '**Promotion of engineering through a structured school-university interface**' has been developed by the University of Strathclyde, the University of Glasgow and local education authorities and schools. It provides an opportunity for school teachers to experience first-year lectures, and university lecturers to experience

school classrooms. The programme has helped to achieve better mutual understanding of subject-related and generic issues connected with learning and teaching approaches at the school-university interface. This includes identifying the differences in academic discourse, where for example the verbs 'to understand' and 'to learn' are not necessarily interpreted in the same way at school and university (First Year Symposium discussion, University of Strathclyde).

The University of the West of Scotland offers the credit-rated access modules **First Steps at University** and **Next Steps at University** for adult returners and further education (FE) students respectively. These modules introduce the study styles and skills required for university and aim to ease the transition into HE in terms of delivery and assessment regimes. The university also runs First Steps in Science, Engineering and Technology and First Steps into Business as part of this suite of modules. Successful completion of these modules guarantees progression to further undergraduate study on a part-time basis. The modules are offered in the evening during both semesters and/or during the university's Summer Programme.

The use of student tutors, who facilitate the tutorial groups and act in the role of 'critical friend', is seen as a key factor in the successful delivery of the modules at the University of the West of Scotland. These tutors are university students who have followed similar learning pathways to the module participants and are a valuable source of academic support as well as advice on other aspects of the university experience (Houston, Knox and McGillivray, 2003; Knox, 2005). The report *Access to Higher Education: Preparing for Success* (Houston, Knox and McGillivray, 2003) evaluated the four credit-rated access modules and explored the demographic characteristics of participating students, the extent to which the modules prepared them for university, and student feedback on their experience of participation.

The range of summer school provision offered by universities generally targets specific groups - for example, school leavers from non-traditional backgrounds, access students, mature students, direct/Higher National entrants and students who have not achieved the necessary grades at Higher level. Discussion with practitioners highlighted the value of summer school provision as a mainstreamed activity accessible to all new entrants regardless of prior educational experience. Basing such programmes on building upon existing strengths to meet personal development and academic goals would generate a positive and engaging preparation for entry to the first year.

SWAP (the Scottish Wider Access Programme) is a long-running, successful programme targeted at adult returners, designed to prepare them for HE. The key issue associated with transition for SWAP students is one of personal attitudes to learning. The peer-support dimension of SWAP in supporting this attitudinal change is highly important. For adult returners, the determination to proceed tends to be the key success factor at university rather than ability. The SWAP model of guidance focuses on supporting personalised learning and confidence-building. SWAP uses traditional campus delivery for most of its programmes, which use Scottish Qualifications Authority units, but there are plans to develop more flexible/work-based learning provision.

Core skills and preparation for HE are embedded within all SWAP programmes of a minimum of an hour a week. The six broad areas addressed in Preparation for Higher Education are core skills (also embedded in Academic Content), the development of

independent learning (through study skills), making the right choice of progression, making progress in HE (both academic and personal), financial matters, and coping with examinations. Some or all of Preparation for HE may be delivered by colleges in partnership with the local HEI. Some SWAP programmes include research activity as part of the preparation for HE. SWAP carried out a small-scale tracking project in 2004, which indicated high satisfaction with Preparation for HE. A pre-access programme being developed at John Wheatley College is focusing on attitudes to learning with particular groups.

In making the decision to apply for university entry, prospective students need access to effective guidance and support to assist them in making appropriate and informed choices about where and what to study. As indicated earlier, the 2006 HEA survey of the first year experience carried out by Yorke and Longden (2007) highlighted lack of good information about a programme or institution as one of the two main factors influencing a student's decision to withdraw (the other was concern about financing). Such information and guidance may be provided by schools, colleges, guidance organisations and community or workplace learning and training providers, as well as universities.

The **Decision-making in Student Progression and Transition project**, known as 'udecide' was a West Forum project hosted by the University of Glasgow. It aimed to assist students in making appropriate educational decisions at key points in their lives, and to improve the retention of students from those areas and groups where participation in HE was low. udecide workshops supported students in making appropriate educational decisions through analysing case studies and action planning. The programme has now broadened to develop materials for students with dyslexia and in other languages for students for whom English is not their first language, including refugees and asylum seekers (www.westforum.org.uk).

The **E-grow (Educational guidance to routes and opportunities)** West Forum project developed from udecide, in response to the recognition that guidance and student support are important issues in student retention (Cormack, 2006). The premise underlying the project was that greater support needs to be provided prior to transition to the institution. This was based on Yorke's (1998) conclusion that many of the reasons for students leaving institutions existed prior to entry and were related to the student's choice of programme or institution and lack of preparedness for the university experience.

E-grow identified models of best practice guidance through interviews with staff in every institution in the West Forum partnership. The project resulted in a compendium of best practice accessible on the West Forum website (www.westforum.org.uk), as well as a framework for a student support strategy. A student support audit questionnaire was developed for use by institutions. The project also produced 'A parent's guide to surviving the college and university transition', which was made available to all institutions. Many of them have included it in PDF form as part of their web-based transition support. The guide was developed in response to an identified need for further information for parents, and has proved highly popular. Glasgow City Council, for example, now prints it for distribution to every school. The project also developed the web-based student toolkit hosted on the West Forum site. This provides advice, information and links to related sites as well as activities on core skills, learning styles and decision-making.

Trinity College Dublin has developed a website for new students to introduce them to the College prior to beginning their course and to prepare them for becoming a student at Trinity. It provides a week-by-week guide to information they will need at relevant points before starting at university and throughout their first semester. Week 1 begins with Leaving Cert results. It is a well-designed website, and information is provided in a lively, accessible way which emphasises the sociable dimension of becoming a university student as well as the academic and administrative aspects (www.tcd.ie/orientation/index.php).

The **UniSmart programme** (www.unismart.biz) is used in universities throughout New Zealand, Australia and the UK, such as the University of Central Lancashire and the University of Teesside. Some universities have been booking the programme annually for eight years. It takes the form of a 75-minute dynamic presentation for students. Upon booking, universities are provided with a questionnaire in order to have the programme content tailored to their specific needs. By naming tough, hard-to-talk-about issues, the presentation encourages students to seek help early, opens minds and builds empathy for fellow students. This is a major factor in creating more supportive and responsible student communities. A sample of the issues covered includes: accepting diversity, personal safety, sexual behaviour, drink spiking, date rape, public nuisance, alcohol and drug abuse, study habits and self-worth. UniSmart is 'a high-energy performance blast of serious content, street theatre tactics, whip-cracking, soundtrack, lighting and comedy'. As UniSmart uses such a fresh and contemporary format, it relates very effectively to young students (see case study in Part 4 for further details).

QM Advance at Queen Margaret University (QMU) is a three-day pre-induction course with a series of follow-on sessions in the first semester. It aims to 'assist identified groups of new students to make a smooth transition to university life and study'. The programme is targeted at two specific groups: mature students and direct-entry students. It focuses on supporting new students to develop their knowledge, skills and confidence to help them become more effective learners (see case study in Part 4 for further details).

13.2.3 Longitudinal induction

Institutions increasingly view induction as a process that begins prior to entry and does not end until the student is integrated into the HE environment (Campbell, 2006). First-week orientation activities at universities increasingly focus on 'finding your way' and 'making friends' rather than overwhelming students with information. These activities can include quizzes, small-group and lab-group challenges and 'treasure hunt'-style activities which require students to find their way around campus and locate the rooms to which they need access in the first week. A longitudinal approach recognises that first years are engaged in a process of continual change and adaptation throughout the first semester and indeed the first year, and that their needs in terms of support will change accordingly.

UHI Millennium Institute has been developing a longitudinal approach to induction which explicitly addresses all aspects of transition - social, personal, cultural and academic. Figure 2 illustrates this development. For further details see the case study in Part 4.

Pre-entry	Orientation	Semester 1	Semester 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● full and accurate course information ● clear contact names ● open days ● interviews/pre-entry guidance ● skills audit, pre-entry support provision (eg summer school) ● information about finances, childcare, accommodation etc. ● information tailored to needs ● information in a variety of formats ● timely provision of information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● social and academic orientation ● meeting with student adviser 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● supportive first-year learning and teaching strategies ● progressive study-skills development ● ongoing transition support ● ongoing academic support ● PDP ● tracking of students to help early identification of at-risk students ● evaluation of induction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● as semester 1 ● preparation for transition to year 2 ● evaluation of first year

Figure 2: components of longitudinal induction at UHI (Campbell, 2006)

13.2.4 Timely provision of information

Linked to a longitudinal or extended approach to induction is a move to providing information on a more timely basis to avoid information overload. The report produced by CHERI as part of the Responding to Student Needs Quality Enhancement Theme (QAA 2004) emphasised the importance of phasing the provision of information at points which are appropriate to students' needs (CHERI, 2004). **UHI**, for example, has been developing and implementing a 'timeline' to determine what information is important and when it should be received (Campbell, 2006). Information also needs to be available in a range of formats - online, paper-based, CD-ROM, face-to face sessions - to allow students to access it as required.

The E-grow project identified two examples of good practice from the college sector in relation to the timely provision of information. **John Wheatley College** (www.jwheatley.ac.uk) has developed a cohesive system of induction for its intranet system, enabling supervised class-style enrolment and induction and allowing students to return to the pages at a later date so they can assimilate the information in 'byte-sized chunks'. The system also has downloadable pages for signing off that students have read and understood health and safety systems and other college policies (Cormack, 2006). **Motherwell College** (www.motherwell.ac.uk) has a student calendar

which is regularly updated and therefore retains students' interest. It contains a wide range of information, from learning style workshops to student football matches. Students access the calendar from the college intranet and because it matches the frequently displayed LCD displays around the college, it encourages student use (Cormack, 2006).

13.2.5 Social integration

As discussed earlier in this report, social integration has been highlighted as an important aspect of transition and in supporting student engagement and empowerment (Tinto, 1987). HEIs have developed a range of approaches to engage students early on through academic and social activities that help them to integrate into university life and with fellow students. The importance of establishing a sense of belonging to a group - to encourage students' engagement with and commitment to their course and the institution - has been emphasised in the literature and was highlighted in the consultations with practitioners.

Establishing supportive peer groups has been stressed in the literature as a way of enhancing the first-year experience during the initial stages of the transition process (McInnis and James, 1995; Yorke and Longden, 2007). But establishing these groups has become increasingly challenging as student numbers and class sizes increase and as programmes adopt a multidisciplinary nature and/or wider subject selection, which means that such programmes have no single departmental home or consistent student group. Many students have few, if any, other students with whom they share more than a few hours of seminar or lecture time a week. This can be a very isolating experience (Peat, Dalziel and Grant, 2001).

In response to this issue, the **University of Sydney** developed a one-day workshop, which is held before the beginning of the orientation period and concentrates on the development of social and academic networks (Peat, Dalziel and Grant, 2001). The students are then organised into peer groups of 10-20 centred on their primary subject area. The groups are timetabled to meet in two small-group classes for up to six hours a week during the first semester. The main activity of the transition workshop is to (re-)introduce students to the importance and benefits of peer networks and group student activities. An evaluation of the workshop based on interviews with attendees and non-attendees indicated that students who attended the workshop made a more successful transition to university life than those who did not, in both an academic and a social sense (Peat, Dalziel and Grant, 2001).

The **University of the West of Scotland School of Computing** has introduced **pair programming** to improve programming skills development among first-year Computer Science and Computer Games Technology students. The tutor considers that they have worked harder, wasted less lab time (surfing, checking email and so on) and got to know one another much better than in previous years. Initial impressions among staff and students have been highly positive. The tutor involved has continued to teach the students in a later module, and feels that they are a more cohesive, socialised group than previous cohorts (see case study in Part 4 for further details).

Group projects requiring collaboration and the development of teamwork skills can also foster the development of peer support networks, as well as problem-solving and lateral thinking skills (Yorke and Longden, 2007). The social dimension of group work has been

viewed very positively by students (Toman and Caldwell, 2006). The **Vertical project** in the **School of Built and Natural Environment at GCU** has adopted an interesting approach to group projects, by giving students the opportunity to work with students from other years of their programme. Students thus engage in a peer-supported learning and teaching process at all four levels of the programme. The structure of the process is that groups of students, nominally from all four years of the programme, work together on a project. Each member of the group has particular tasks to perform and the most senior member of the group (normally a final-year student) is the project manager, responsible for the smooth running of the project. Feedback from students has emphasised the stimulating and challenging learning experience these projects have provided.

Buddy and mentoring systems, linked in some cases to credit-bearing modules for the students acting as mentors, are also being increasingly developed in HEIs to provide a source of peer support for first-year students. The **QMConnect mentoring project** was established at Queen Margaret University in 2002. It is managed centrally by the Transition and Pre-entry Guidance Adviser in Student Services. The project supports new undergraduates (including direct entrants) during the transition period by matching them with more experienced students who have volunteered to offer peer support (see case study in Part 4 for further detail). These student mentors can provide a continuum of support from pre-entry to post-entry. It is important to provide a range of choices for student support - for example student networks, buddy and mentoring systems, mature student associations - to meet different students' needs. Where possible, such support should be controlled by students.

For further exploration and guidance on peer support, the reader should refer to the work of the First Year Experience Enhancement Theme development project, 'Peer support in the first year'. This has identified a number of models of peer support, such as peer-assisted learning, tutorials, small-group projects, problem-based learning and peer assessment. The project has also explored socially integrative forms of peer support, such as information from peers, formal/informal mentoring, alumni mentoring of undergraduates, and voluntary support groups. The benefits and challenges associated with peer support in terms of facilitating student engagement and empowerment have been investigated through this project (Black and MacKenzie, 2008).

Spaces for social integration are also important. The Student Evaluation Project at Glasgow Caledonian University (Toman and Caldwell, 2006) identified the success of the new **Saltire Centre (library and learning centre)** at GCU in addressing the issue of transience, which is a feature of an institution with predominantly home-based or 'commuter' students. The Saltire Centre provides a social space that different types of students feel comfortable in accessing. Mature students, for example, tend not to use the student union, which is the other key social space to which students have access.

The **Learner's Experience of e-Learning (LEX) research project** funded by the pedagogy strand of the JISC e-Learning Development Programme investigated students' current experiences and expectations of e-learning across the broad range of further, higher, adult and community education and work-based learning (Creanor et al, 2006). The study revealed the importance of networking skills in terms of being an effective (e-)learner and the use of technology to access this support network, which comprised friends, peers, family and tutors. Some of the students interviewed preferred to separate

the use of technology for leisure and study use, but others were actively using their mobile phones to text peers and tutors with academic questions, record lectures, access the internet and download course-related material onto their MP3 players. The impact of informal learning - engaged in through social networking and the use of personal technology - on mainstream learning was highlighted by the project team as an area meriting further research. Students surveyed as part of the CRL Student Evaluation Project (Toman and Caldwell, 2006) viewed formal support as necessary to survive, and informal support as necessary to succeed.

13.2.6 Progressive skills development

Progressive study skills can be embedded into the programme or provided as workshops or tutorials which are synchronised with critical periods - for example: first assignment, first feedback, first examination. Excellent examples of centrally available support which is highly accessible to students and where there is close collaboration between learning support and teaching staff include:

- the **Effective Learning Service at GCU** - one-to-one tutorial support and workshops
- the **Learning Centre at the University of Dundee** - offering a P@SS (Personal Academic Student Skills) credit-bearing module, Gateway to Learning (academic skills for students new to university study), workshops and other forms of targeted or subject-based learning support
- the **Centre for Teaching, Learning and Assessment at the University of Edinburgh** - Procrastination Workshops and other resources and workshops.

13.2.7 Personal development planning

Embedding skills development into personal development planning is an approach used by many institutions. It supports a diagnostic process to identify areas for further development early on in the programme. The challenge is to engage all aspects of a student's programme in the PDP process. The **Faculty of Education at the University of Strathclyde** has piloted the use of an **e-portfolio**, 'Pebblepad', to support PDP in order to integrate it more coherently with the rest of the BEd first year. This tool has proved effective in supporting self-managed learning, self and peer assessment, and interaction and dialogue with peers and tutors (University of Strathclyde, 2006a).

De Montfort University (Ply and Pillai, eds, 2006) has adopted an approach to supporting transition which integrates preparation for HE study and the development of study skills into a PDP process. Students complete a workbook which constitutes the first step in the PDP process. It comprises activities designed to help first-year students to reflect on the skills they already have, think about areas they need to work on, identify what further opportunities and support are available, and plan how and when they will develop their skills. This process is supported through group or individual sessions with a personal tutor. Students are given a secure space on the managed learning environment to develop and maintain a personal development record. Guidance is provided on how to develop each skill set further through subjects and other workshops held during the first year and beyond. The workbook is viewed as the beginning of personal, academic and career development as a student at De Montfort.

The **Professional Orientation and Practice module** undertaken by first-year students in the **School of Built and Natural Environment at GCU** is designed to support induction, IT skills, generic themes, discipline-specific workshops and PDP. This is linked to a reflective professional development and portfolio-building process throughout each level of the programme, supported by a Professional Development Tutor (GCU, 2006).

The **School of Computing at the University of the West of Scotland** has a **module on PDP for the IT professional**. It was developed out of the Next Steps at University module, but is now included in all full-time programmes in the School. The PDP module explicitly addresses transition from school or college to university, creates a dialogue among students, and develops their personal skills in the computing area. Paid student tutors, who completed this module a year earlier, are used to support the module. They act as a critical friend to students and encourage motivation and confidence-building.

The subject-specific focus of induction and transition support was highlighted in discussion with practitioners as being of key importance. It needs to be relevant to the subject the student is studying, and should involve academic staff to emphasise its importance. It must be embedded into the core curriculum and regarded as mainstream academic work that students undertake.

The First Year Experience Enhancement Theme development project exploring 'Personal Development Planning (PDP) in the first year' has highlighted the link between school-based personal learning planning and the transition to university PDP processes (Miller et al, 2008): 'Personal Learning Planning is a central concept within the Scottish Executive Curriculum Review Group's A Curriculum for Excellence... The growth of PDP activity at school level mean that, increasingly, HE entrants from Scottish schools are likely to have a greater understanding of the learning process and experience of the reflection and planning processes. An understanding of developments outside the HE sector and an appreciation of the range of possible prior experiences of new HE students is therefore important for those developing and reviewing PDP systems in higher education.' (Miller et al, 2008)

The project team has also highlighted the role that PDP can play in supporting transition to university-level learning through its focus on developing reflective and metacognitive skills which enhance awareness of oneself as a learner. Reflective learners are more likely to be effective learners: 'Another key element for students to learn is the identity and practice that form their discipline... those who fail to become part of the community of the discipline are most likely to drop out. Different disciplines address aspects of being a student differently and approaches to the purposes and nature of PDP therefore also vary.' (Miller et al, 2008)

13.2.8 Embedding transition support in learning and teaching

Assisting first-year students to adapt successfully to the university experience, as well as facilitating their engagement and empowerment, is a key function of teaching staff in terms of:

- the nature and levels of their interaction with students
- the provision of a stimulating learning environment through a range of different learning, teaching and assessment modes and approaches

- their understanding of the issues that first-year students are dealing with as they undergo the process of transition.

The **University of Melbourne** has a comprehensive induction programme with a separate section for university staff. This contains reports of what students have said about teaching, studying and the university transition experience in general, as well as information about staff events (www.services.unimelb.edu.au/transition). The programme also includes a transition checklist for lecturers of first-year subjects. It focuses on encouraging students to engage with the lecturer and with their peers, to assist the process of transition.

All first-year students within the **University of Strathclyde Business School** undertake a **Management Development Planning module** as part of their programme. This faculty-based course deals with the main aspects of transition to the first year. The students work in teams from week one to encourage the development of peer support networks and friendship groups. They carry out small-group teamwork activities for which they receive regular feedback. One of the primary aims of this approach is to develop personal confidence. Students work on two significant projects in year one which seek to develop a contextual knowledge of business. The students meet every week and attendance is compulsory. The workshops focus on progressive skills development - business-orientated and personal - as well as the acquisition of reflective skills. The module also has an employability focus and engages with key employers in year one (see the case study in Part 4 for further details).

The **First Year Experience Issues in Health and Social Care module** run at **Napier University** focuses on adult learning, student transition into the HEI setting and engagement with the learning process as well as the learning outcomes (Brown, 2004). The module was developed in response to the large-group teaching involved in the programme and the fact that the students were mainly adult returners with a wide range of age differences, life experience and ability. The teaching and learning strategy has been designed to encourage student confidence and provide a range of learning activities to give students an early opportunity to interact with peers and build relationships with lecturers. It enables students to anticipate and interact with module content and take responsibility for their own learning (see the case study in Part 4 for further details).

The **Enhance project** within the **School of Nursing, Midwifery and Community Health (NMCH) at GCU** has been supporting the development of scholarship skills in the first year of learning through an enhanced induction programme (Andrew, Reid and McGuiness, 2006). It has been developed in response to the particular discipline-related needs of first-year students in the School of NMCH, for which a generic approach to induction would be ineffective. Enhance aims to assist students in acclimatising to an academic environment, developing wider scholarship skills in health-related programmes, and using reflection as a tool for personal and professional development in health-related disciplines. The programme comprises tailored, interactive, student-focused activities to support the academic development of first-year students within the School (Andrew, Reid and McGuiness, 2006) (see the case study in Part 4 for further details).

Key factors in providing a stimulating, motivating and engaging learning experience include: increased small-group working, based on problem-solving; enquiry or peer support in tackling assessment tasks such as written assignments; greater use of formative assessments to provide regular feedback on progress; and greater use of self-assessment and peer assessment to encourage students to take responsibility for the learning process. These factors have all been highlighted in the literature and featured in the discussion with practitioners.

The work of First Year Experience Enhancement Theme development projects exploring 'Curriculum design for the first year', 'Transforming assessment and feedback', 'Introducing scholarship skills' and 'Personalisation of the first year' has provided useful guidance on how such approaches can be used to support transition and engagement.

The 'Curriculum design for the first year' project identified 'an ideal curriculum design process' based on synthesis of the literature on this issue (Bovill, Morss and Bulley 2008). The project team argued that facilitating the development of transferable skills for learning and employability and increasing the social and academic integration of students with the institution and their subject and discipline 'requires emphasis on student-centred, active learning tasks that increase independence and collaboration' (Bovill, Morss and Bulley, 2008). In an ideal curriculum design process 'students, graduates and employers should be consulted to inform the overall programme aims and identify students' ability on entry' (Bovill, Morss and Bulley, 2008). The project team acknowledged the challenging nature of such a process and that there are few examples where it has been applied in practice.

The 'Transforming assessment and feedback' project built on the e-Learning Transformation initiative Re-Engineering Assessment Practices (REAP) project to explore the social and motivational dimensions of feedback and assessment design in the first year. The work of this project is a useful source of guidance on exploring the role of formative assessment and feedback in supporting the process of transition (Nicol, 2008).

13.2.9 Proactive student support

Thomas and Hixenbaugh (2006) argued that because of the expansion of HE and the subsequent depersonalisation of the educational experience in many institutions, the challenge of developing a sense of belonging has increased. They contended that personal tutoring may hold the key to students developing relationships with others and with the university. Students who lack the confidence to approach personal tutors may benefit from a system which is more 'proactive, structured and prioritizes relationships' (Thomas and Hixenbaugh, 2006). Group models are increasingly being used in response to resourcing issues, but also have the benefit of enabling students to get to know each other as well as their tutor, thus facilitating social integration.

The **School of Computing at the University of the West of Scotland** has developed a proactive **school-based support model** for transition, which centres on the role of the **Student Liaison Officer (SLO)**. The SLO acts as a 'one-stop shop' to all students, whatever their difficulty. The SLO is far more available to students than other staff (such as personal tutors, module coordinators) and liaises with academic and central services to provide the appropriate support and advice that students may require. The SLO coordinates induction and appears as a named contact for students from the moment

they are welcomed to the School. The SLO operates the attendance monitoring system and arranges interviews with students who have poor attendance. Clear routes of support and referral, via personal tutors and additional labs, are determined and advertised to students. Proactive resit support is also provided. The SLO collaborates with academic staff within the School and central services to ensure that a comprehensive, coordinated approach to support is provided for students (see case study in Part 4 for further details).

13.2.10 Student control and choice

Student empowerment is generated by enabling students to take control of aspects of their university experience. This can be done through enabling students to contribute to decision-making and to influence curriculum design through:

- initiatives such as student representative panels and staff-student liaison committees (Krause, 2003)
- engaging in problem-solving and teamworking which require them to formulate and implement strategies to achieve a set of objectives
- involvement in extracurricular activities which are student-led rather than institution-led.

Genuine dialogue and partnership working between university leaders and students' associations are important for achieving key strategic priorities, as is the direct involvement of student representatives in student recruitment, transition and retention. Students need to understand their own role in ensuring successful transition and be actively encouraged to act as 'co-producers' of the university experience rather than 'consumers'.

Student control and choice were key themes that emerged through the LEX research project undertaken by Creanor et al (2006) on the e-learner experience. Technology-enhanced learning enabled students to have greater control over their mode and location of study, the types of technology they used, personalisation of their virtual and physical environments, and their approach to learning activities. Having control of their learning environment was highlighted as being important to the students who were interviewed, and particularly so for those with disabilities. A strong sense of ownership of the learning process clearly generated greater motivation and engagement on the part of the students. The development of friendship networks and learning communities also enhanced their sense of self-worth and control, which are necessary preconditions for empowerment.

The First Year Experience Enhancement Theme development project on 'Personalisation of the first year' undertook sector consultation on the way in which personalisation of the curriculum can support student engagement and empowerment. The student life cycle model was used as a framework for this discussion. The outcomes of this consultation are contained in the project's report (Knox and Wyper, 2008).

Students can also take a strategic lead in addressing issues of transition support. **Project Q** at **Cardiff University** provides an interesting and effective example of such student leadership. The information about this project in the following paragraphs has been extracted from the project website (www.cardiff.ac.uk/studx/project-q/).

Project Q was originally proposed by the Students' Union at Cardiff University as a means of assessing:

- the expectations and aspirations of all students entering Cardiff University
- the experience of students while studying at Cardiff University
- the views of former students who have left the university.

Since December 2004 the students' union and the university have worked together on the project to address these areas. The information gained from Project Q is being used to understand and enhance the student experience in different facets of student life.

Project Q is aiming to:

- improve communication with students
- improve information provided to students
- improve the quality of service provided to students
- increase the opportunities for students to provide feedback on their experiences
- work in partnership for the benefit of students and staff.

Phase 1 of Project Q focused on evaluating the recruitment, admission and induction processes within Cardiff University. To help in informing this exercise, online surveys entitled 'Coming to Cardiff' were completed by first-year undergraduate and postgraduate students in November/December 2005 and October/November 2006. Key features and findings were produced, which are available on the project website. www.cf.ac.uk/studx/resources/Main%20Report.pdf

Phase 2 of Project Q sought to gauge the views of current undergraduate and postgraduate students on the quality of the learning experience at Cardiff University, with particular reference to:

- the accuracy, completeness and reliability of the information published by the university about the quality of its programmes and the standards of its awards
- the information that students receive about the academic performance expected of them and the ways in which their performance is assessed
- the experience of students as learners
- the opportunity for students to participate in the management of quality and standards within the institution.

These issues were discussed with students at a number of small focus group sessions. The outcomes of these sessions formed the basis of the Phase 2 report produced in autumn 2006.

14 Enhancing support for transition: policy discussion

The ideas which emerged through the Transition project's policy-level discussions on enhancing transition support centred on: sector-wide collaboration - establishing threshold levels of transition support; development of strategy; frontloading the first year in terms of resources; induction and the student lifecycle; diversity - a critical issue in transition support; tracking, monitoring and follow-up; personal interaction

with staff; clarification of expectations; curriculum redesign; providing a more challenging learning experience; staff engagement in supporting transition; and empowering students.

14.1 Consultation meetings

Consultation meetings with six policy-makers/senior academic staff were undertaken to consider the key features of effective transition support, and ways in which existing processes within HE could be enhanced.

The findings and preliminary conclusions in relation to the key project questions, derived through the literature review and consultation with practitioners, were used as the basis of reflection and discussion during these meetings. Many of the ideas that emerged from these discussions built on the issues which have been considered earlier in this report. The key outcomes of these discussions, in terms of ways in which support for transition can be enhanced, are summarised below.

14.2 Sector-wide collaboration - threshold levels of transition support

If Scotland is to achieve a world-class higher education system, every HEI needs to provide a first-rate transition for all students. Practice currently varies across the sector, which means that the quality of the student experience varies among and across institutions. Since transition support is not directly linked to competitive advantage, institutions could feasibly collaborate in addressing this issue.

It was recommended that a minimum standard threshold for transition support should be agreed by universities in order to generate good practice guidelines. A national debate on this issue which also engages partner stakeholders - schools, colleges and the community - was suggested as a useful vehicle for developing such guidelines. A threshold level of support processes for all students would enable more intensive support to be targeted at those who require it; not all students would require this maximum level of support. A system offering access to support in a range of forms and enabling 'self-serve', online approaches would enable an '80/20 model'² of delivery.

14.3 Development of strategy

The first year as an area of policy and analysis is relatively new to most institutions in the UK. Most HEIs do not focus on the first year as a whole, but rather on faculties or schools, departments and programmes. The First Year Experience Enhancement Theme is therefore both unifying and comparative.

Most HEIs in Scotland have now recognised that dispersed pockets of good practice within an institution are not a sufficient response to issues of transition and progression. A strategic approach informed by research is essential to ensure fundamental cross-institutional impact. Institutions need to track, analyse and understand patterns of progression and retention, which will vary across the institution, schools, faculties, departments and programmes, in order to develop appropriate responses and approaches.

² In other words enabling 80 per cent of effort and services to be focused on the 20 per cent of the student population that will most benefit from this.

The outcomes of the Student Evaluation Project at Glasgow Caledonian University indicated that those students who did not complete all of their assessments in semester 1 had poor retention rates. Was this non-completion due to a low level of engagement with the university? Was it due to finding the process of becoming a university student too difficult? The question of what underlay the clear relationship between non-completion of first semester assignments and failure to progress was posed. By understanding this pattern and identifying the problems and issues underlying this failure to complete, institutions would be able to provide students with better support. This would result in more successful engagement in their programme of study and greater success as students.

Institutions need to acknowledge that change which enhances the first year experience in terms of supporting the transition of all students requires time, resources and commitment. Transition and progression strategies should be integrated within an institution's business model and recognised as core activity, and staff's involvement in this core activity should be rewarded through pay and progression.

Strategically, institutions engage in activities that generate or attract resources. The new Widening Access Retention Premium provided to institutions by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) illustrates government commitment to improving student retention. Strategic development in relation to student-focused approaches to transition will be supported by this additional resource. The negative financial impact of student withdrawal is clearly also a key driver.

It was suggested that the starting point for institutions in developing a strategy for supporting transition and progression should be to establish a hierarchy of needs, covering practical (for example in terms of finance and accommodation), social and academic needs. Mapping the nature of transition from school to university, from college to university, from employer to university, from community to university, and from unemployment to university will assist institutions in understanding this hierarchy of needs and how they can be most effectively addressed.

Customer segmentation and customer journey mapping are techniques used extensively in the commercial sector to better understand and respond to customers' needs. These techniques are increasingly being applied to the public sector and in relation to higher education. Student-focused extended journey mapping has been used by two universities in England to understand issues associated with transition, retention and progression from the student perspective. The data from this exercise have been used to change existing approaches to transition support in relation to practical, social and academic issues as part of strategic development (see Spirit of Creation case study in Part 4 for further detail). The advantage of this approach over national student experience surveys is that the data generated are specific to a particular institution or indeed a particular school or faculty. A system which reflects student-identified (as opposed to institution-determined) requirements in terms of transition support will enhance student engagement and empowerment.

A multilayered approach to supporting transition is necessary, requiring coordination at central level. This should involve partnership working with coordinators or champions at faculty/school and department level and support services staff. The implementation of

strategy will require changes to practice and culture, in terms of the university's pre-entry role, the nature of the curriculum and the nature of support services.

14.4 Frontloading the first year in terms of resources

The idea of frontloading the first year with greater resources, to ensure achievement and success in subsequent stages of the programme, was highlighted and linked to the need to address the 'borderline pass'. The tendency is to focus resources on students who are 'at risk' or those who are high achievers. As a result, there is a danger of providing insufficient support to a middle band of students who do not fail, but do not fulfil their full potential or do not fully engage with the university experience. The 'massification' of HE has led to a predominantly large-class delivery model in the first year, which can be an anonymous and lonely experience.

Greater resources for the first year would enable programme staff to develop more manageable, student-centred models of learning and teaching. Frontloading the first year would require a reallocation of resources from years three to five. This would be likely to lead to a reduction in options at honours level, but would generate more resources overall if retention rates were improved through this greater investment in the first year.

The SFC's review of funding models is considering the differential funding levels of college and university provision. If the outcome of this review is an increased level of funding for years three to five, compared with years one and two, this would undermine the feasibility of focusing resources on the first year. However, in the policy discussions the view was expressed that 'if the sector is serious about enhancing the first year experience, it will require serious resourcing'.

14.5 Induction and the student life cycle

The vital nature of the pre-entry stage in terms of decision-making and preparation for the university experience has been stressed. The student life cycle begins well before admission to university. It starts at the point at which an individual, whether in school, college, the community or the workplace, begins to consider HE as an option. Indeed, in terms of aspiration-raising and promoting awareness about higher education it should begin before individuals even decide that HE is a possible route for them. Pre-entry activities that support potential students to develop the confidence, skills and knowledge to apply to, and prepare for, university form part of an induction process which supports smoother transition on entry.

Pre-entry support constitutes a major planning issue for institutions. Historically, such activities have been carried out by support staff over the summer period. Academic staff are increasingly becoming involved in this pre-sessional period to provide an introduction to the discipline, discuss expectations and explore core learning skills within a subject context. Institutions also need to work effectively with schools, colleges, the community and employers to ensure that issues associated with transition for particular student groups and subject areas are mutually understood and collaborative solutions developed. This collaboration may take place at institutional level, for example through access coordinators, and at subject level via lecturers and teachers within schools.

The issue of writing and mathematical skills is a problem for many subject areas. Better liaison with English and maths teachers within schools would not aim to lead to radical curricular change, but would focus on developing a better understanding of the expectations of HE in these areas. It would also enable university teaching staff to respond better to the skills and levels of expertise that students bring into higher education.

Developing the knowledge and understanding of guidance staff in schools, colleges and universities through collaborative approaches would also enhance pre-entry support in terms of more informed student choice and better preparation. Pre-entry guidance also requires better exploitation of online technology in providing accessible guidance and promoting early engagement with the university experience for all prospective students, whether school leavers or adult learners.

The sustained nature of transition needs to be recognised, and induction should be viewed as continuing throughout the first year until its successful completion. It has been widely acknowledged that overloading students with information at the start of the first year is not helpful. Students require access to information, guidance and support throughout the first year, and they need to know how to access it at the time they actually need it.

14.6 Diversity - a critical issue in transition support

The increasing heterogeneity of the student population, including within the different learner groups, in terms of prior educational experience, personal and work circumstances, attitudes to learning and motivation levels requires a range of approaches and a flexible system of support. The question of what is an effective solution to problems associated with transition depends on the nature of a particular student group, in a particular programme, in a particular institution. For some students the issue of transition is not problematic, while for others it represents a huge challenge. It depends on personal circumstances and life histories as well as institutional cultures. There is, however, a correlation between institutions with large numbers of students from areas of social deprivation and low retention rates, which has been recognised in the SFC's new Widening Access Retention Premium. The social composition of the student cohort influences the process of transition, which varies not just among but also across institutions.

In terms of how to respond to diverse groups, support systems need to establish an appropriate balance between a proactive approach and student choice and autonomy. Students should not be compelled to engage in support processes, but support needs to be visible, normalised and viewed as part of mainstream activity. This perception needs to be endorsed by teaching staff and reinforced through integrating the development of core and reflective skills and learning strategies within subject-based provision.

14.7 Tracking, monitoring and follow-up

Early tracking and monitoring should be used to ensure swift follow-up for non-attendance. Proactive follow-up and support would facilitate early intervention before the situation reaches crisis point for a student. Follow-up by programme staff on students' reasons for withdrawal is often lacking. Often, student withdrawal is not an active choice: the student simply stops attending and without university follow-up,

continued non-attendance is perceived to be endorsed. Where exit interviews do take place, they tend to reveal a series of cumulative factors leading to a student's decision to withdraw, rather than a single major issue. If students give a single reason for their decision to leave, it may simply be the last in a series of factors, which constitutes the 'final straw'. An understanding of the fuller picture in terms of the experience of students who withdraw and the causes of their lack of engagement needs to be gained through enhanced exit follow-up processes. This can signal areas at institution or programme level that need to be addressed.

Tracking systems which aim to identify 'at risk' students on a cohort basis are dependent on the data generated by student information management systems. If such data are accessible in practice, rather than simply in theory, targets for transition support can be established on a cohort risk basis by analysing factors such as educational background, postcode area, ethnic background and disability.

The de-registering after 6-8 weeks of students who have never attended and have not responded to any follow-up approach by the HEI was proposed as a means of generating more accurate student retention data. Currently, withdrawal rates at the end of the first year include those who did not engage at all. Substantial investment is often made in trying to engage these non-attendees, and is consequently diverted from those students who are participating but not achieving their full potential. Proactive monitoring should not just focus on retention, but also on performance. Institutions should seek to improve the performance of all students, rather than settle for the lowest common denominator.

14.8 Personal interaction with staff

The challenge of developing a learner-centred, more individualised approach to support within the 'mass experience' of the first year (Harvey, Drew and Smith, 2006) was discussed. Proposed strategies focused on staff-student interaction. It was agreed that every student should have a named member of academic staff throughout their first year with whom they could discuss issues associated with their progress. This may be part of a PDP process, proactive personal tutoring, faculty/school-based student liaison role, or small-group tutorial model. Early engagement with academic staff could also be achieved through a pre-entry tutorial role, which would encourage students to make contact with their named member of staff by email or telephone prior to the start of their programme.

This type of support role should be included in the performance objectives for staff, and payment and reward systems should recognise staff performance in this area. Personal interaction with staff is particularly important in institutions with a significant commuter student population, where campus-based peer support is more difficult to achieve.

14.9 Clarification of expectations

The clarification of expectations needs to begin before entry, and should be supported by the institution through pre-arrival guidance for students via websites, visits to schools and colleges, campus visits for prospective students, and through liaison with school and college staff as well as with parents.

The idea of 'contracts' between first-year students and teaching staff was suggested as a means of clarifying the lecturer or tutor's expectations of the student, and the student's expectations of the learning experience. Expectations need to be made explicit early on in the first semester. This can also be achieved through prompt, tailored feedback. The request for more feedback has been a consistent feature of national and institutional student surveys. This was acknowledged to be an insatiable demand to some extent, but it is an area that does, however, need to be addressed.

The barrier to greater formative feedback is generally staff perception that it generates greater work within an already time-constrained environment. However, the misconception is often the tendency to interpret formative feedback as formative assessment. Formative feedback can include a variety of approaches, such as oral feedback in a seminar or tutorial, that do not have to involve the assessment of work to a deadline and which provide comments rather than a grade. There is a need to raise awareness among staff of the range of different resource-efficient formative feedback methods that can be used, including technology-enhanced learning approaches.

14.10 Curriculum redesign

The idea of changing the pace of the first year to enable the development of metacognitive skills, learning strategies and core and reflective skills within the context of subject discipline was raised during the discussions with policy-makers. There is a need to consider delivery models that enable greater formative assessment early on. The compacted delivery model associated with completing modules on a semester basis tends to lead to an emphasis on summative assessment and pressure on staff to 'deliver' subject content, rather than focusing on skills and metacognitive development. Early formative assessment is an effective mechanism for clarifying expectations and an understanding of university-level learning. The REAP project coordinated by the University of Strathclyde is developing robust forms of formative assessment which are more resource-efficient in terms of staff time.

A move to 'long, thin' modules achieved over the course of a year rather than a semester was suggested as a key mechanism for effecting this change of pace and focus. This would enable greater formative assessment throughout the first semester and would avoid the post-Christmas exam model, which is the peak time for student withdrawal. The impact of such curriculum redesign on institutions with significant numbers of international exchange or visiting students was raised. Such students are often attracted to the prospect of completing modules and gaining credit within one semester. Developing a system which changes this pattern might adversely affect international student programmes, which can constitute an important source of university revenue. Creating a dual system in which visiting students undertake a different assessment from home students could lead to the perception of a second-class experience.

The idea of a common core curriculum for the first year was discussed. It was agreed that this would have the advantage of providing an interdisciplinary environment that would give a more holistic learning experience and enable students to develop their transferable skills and gain experience of different disciplines clustered around a common theme or project. However, where such a reshaping of the curriculum has been debated, such as at the University of St Andrews, there was resistance from students (who wanted to retain as much choice and control as possible) and from staff (who did not want to

lose the range of options or pathways within their programmes). However, the debate is a useful one for institutions to engage in, and staff may wish to consider critically reflecting on existing programme structures, content and curricular patterns. Institutions should consider the question of whether it is possible to create more spaces in the first-year curriculum for the development of skills, strategies and positive attitudes and behaviours that will ensure greater success in later stages of the programme.

It was stressed that a radical restructuring of the first-year curriculum is desirable only if it is helpful to the majority of first-year students. If change is effected to meet the needs of a significant minority, it may diminish the experience of transition for those students for whom the first year experience is largely positive.

14.11 Providing a more challenging learning experience

The notion that students are often not sufficiently challenged during the first year was also raised in discussion. Students can quickly adopt a more passive approach to learning unless their programmes incorporate elements that require a more active approach, such as problem-based or enquiry-based learning, or collaborative teamworking, as well as peer and self-assessment. An interconnected approach to curricular development would support this more challenging and engaging approach to learning.

The argument was posed that the first year should be viewed as a developmental phase in which students are progressively challenged as they embark on a steep learning curve. By the end of this phase, students will have developed the skills they need for successful progression and achievement. During the developmental phase, students must be allowed to 'fail' in a way that promotes learning rather than acting as a de-motivator. Formative, peer and self-assessment are useful means of enabling students to understand where they have misunderstood or underachieved. A focus on formative rather than summative assessment in the first semester is also more likely to encourage risk-taking in project-based and enquiry and discovery-focused learning activities, rather than 'playing it safe'.

Many first-year students have a significant proportion of non-structured independent study time which they do not know how to use effectively. Small-group projects can help to structure the learning process around engineered tasks and introduce first years to the research-teaching link early on. This type of learning activity early in the first year will assist the development of transferable skills and facilitate active engagement in non-structured periods of learning.

More effective dissemination of examples of practice across the whole academic community would encourage wider debate within an institution on the level of challenge in the first-year curriculum and ways to support better engagement.

14.12 Staff engagement in supporting transition

There is wide acknowledgement of the need to address and embed support for transition within teaching and learning approaches. However, staff engagement in supporting transition within mainstream teaching activity has been identified as a major challenge.

The first year as an area of policy and analysis needs to have the same prominence within institutions as other policy areas such as the research agenda, with explicit senior management support. Teaching staff need to be supported, through initial and continuing professional development, in gaining an understanding of transition issues and how they can be addressed in teaching and learning strategies. A pedagogical approach to the first year needs to underpin curriculum design and review, and first-year teaching needs to be valued and recognised as a high-status activity.

Embedding transition support into teaching and learning approaches can create tensions, as this may be more difficult to achieve in some subject areas than others. Staff engagement needs to be secured by establishing a sense of ownership and responsibility. Programme staff who are experiencing the financial and pedagogical consequences of poor progression are likely to be more receptive to developing strategies to address this issue. Staff have to recognise transition and progression within programmes as a 'problem' which needs to be solved, if real staff commitment to changing existing practices is to be achieved.

Persuasion by example was suggested as an effective strategy for engaging staff in developing new approaches within their programmes. This could be supported by providing more effective processes that enable staff to showcase and share practice and approaches across institutions and develop communities of practice involving both academic and support staff. Supporting learning and teaching development through strategic funding was highlighted as a key lever for staff engagement. It is clearly also important to build recognition of innovative approaches to first-year teaching into reward and career progression processes.

Most teaching staff in HEIs have recognised the importance of progressive skills development. Curriculum design and review provides the opportunity to think about the process by which these skills can be developed through teaching, learning and assessment strategies. Library and IT support staff are increasingly working collaboratively with teaching staff to support students in academic skills development. The development of IT and information literacy skills is a particular focus of this collaboration. This crossing of boundaries has led to a more integrated student support model.

Personal development planning provides an effective vehicle for enabling students to become more reflective, identify their existing skills and areas for further development, and explore the opportunities within their programmes for such development. However, it was acknowledged that student and staff engagement with PDP remains a major challenge across most institutions.

14.13 Empowering students

The view was expressed that if students had a strong sense of self-efficacy, which they can learn, they would be more likely to act in a self-efficacious way. Students need to know where to find help and support, so that the locus of control rests with them (rather than with the institution) in terms of managing their own experience. Moving into the university experience can be perceived as 'de-skilling' to some extent by new students. Transition strategies should seek to help students to achieve a high level of self-efficacy in terms of finance, accommodation, core and learning skills, understanding expectations and delivering accordingly.

Proactive intervention should be developed and delivered in terms of the key competences required to succeed in the first year. Access to support at timely points through the year should be in a format and at stages which suit the student, through the use of online resources and information, rather than relying on student support staff to provide the information. It was proposed that the underpinning principle of support should be that students should be enabled to do as much by themselves, for themselves, as they can, as such positive reinforcement of self-efficacy will support student empowerment.

The first-year curriculum should be designed to value and build on students' existing knowledge, strengths and skills. Implicit in this is the recognition that the starting point for a programme is different for different students. The development and operation of strategies within programme delivery to engage all students - with differing levels of experience, prior educational attainment, confidence and ability - is a highly challenging issue for staff. Explicit recognition of the part-time working experiences of students within the curriculum, in the context of developing employability skills, would also support student engagement and empowerment. The role of PDP in supporting this process has been highlighted.

The importance of the role of informal and social networking, peer support, peer mentoring and buddying systems was highlighted in terms of supporting social and academic integration as well as student engagement and empowerment. Institutions need to explore the most effective mechanisms for creating better informal networks of learning and guidance. Student mentoring is an important element in this process, both before entry through liaison work in schools and colleges and also post-entry. The integration of personal and learning technologies was also highlighted as a key feature of developing informal support networks.

Part 3

15 Key features of effective transition support

From the literature review and consultation with practitioners and policy-makers, the following conclusions on the key features of effective transition support have been reached.

Transition support needs to be addressed at the pre-entry stage, through:

- targeted and timely website guidance
- taster packs or taster experiences
- collaboration by schools, colleges, guidance organisations, the community and workplaces in enabling prospective students to make appropriate choices of programme and institution
- supporting preparation for university study
- clarifying expectations in terms of the academic and social dimensions of the university experience
- summer school provision.

Transition support needs to be viewed as a longitudinal process which begins at pre-entry and continues until the end of the first year. Transition to the second year of the programme also needs to be part of this continuum.

Transition support needs to be part of the institution's mainstream teaching activity:

- Teaching staff, as well as learning support staff, need to understand the multidimensional aspects of transition - academic, personal and social. They need to understand the actual diversity of the student group and avoid generalisations based on learner profile. This issue should be explicitly addressed in the professional development of new and existing staff, as well as informing curriculum design.
- Learning and teaching strategies should emphasise the importance of skills development and self-directed enquiry.
- Evaluation of a student's progress should be built in early on through regular feedback processes. There should be a greater emphasis on formative rather than summative assessment, particularly in the first semester, to generate meaningful feedback and support adaptation to the university learning experience. Expectations of staff and students need to be mutually understood and addressed early on through effective staff-student interaction.
- Social networking and collaboration should be explicitly encouraged in learning and teaching activities, as should the development of independent learning skills and behaviours through enhanced group-working and project-based activities.

- Student engagement and empowerment need to be addressed by creating a stimulating learning environment, which provides the opportunity for students to personalise their learning and take control of aspects of the learning process - mode, location, means of accessing materials, and means of engaging in dialogue with staff and peers. The use of technology supports the development of a more flexible learning environment, which enables students to combine work, play and study more easily.

Strategies to support the social transition of students should be explicitl encouraged by encouraging peer support, social networks and friendship groups through engagement in academic and social activities within and outside the curriculum.

Progressive skills development should be supported by the PDP process, which includes a diagnostic function to identify particular learning support needs or areas for development early on. The PDP process - along with the development of learning strategies, study skills and information literacies where possible - should be integrated into the mainstream activity of the programme and contextualised within the discipline, and should actively engage with all parts of the programme.

Collaboration between central support services and teaching staff, as well as library and IT support staff, is essential to ensure a coordinated, comprehensive approach to supporting transition. Students should have access to guidance and support in a range of formats. Access to this support should be viewed as part of the normal activity of students, rather than as a solution to a crisis. A proactive personal tutoring system can provide a positive route to this support, as can student mentoring.

The focus of pre-entry and post-entry learning support should be on valuing the learning that has taken place so far, and how it can be improved and further developed. This would include identifying existing learning styles and strategies and encouraging students to think about the ways in which these may change or develop as they proceed through their programme.

Information and guidance linked to induction and transition support need to be made available to students on a timely basis, avoiding information overload. Institutions are increasingly developing and using a centrality index/timeline to ensure that accurate information in a range of formats is provided to students at an appropriate point. Teaching staff, as well as support staff, need to understand this timeline and be aware that the nature of students' needs will change as they progress through the first year.

Transition support needs to be part of a coordinated institutional strategy, with a clear policy and appropriate resources. Generic institutional policy and guidelines need to be interpreted at faculty/school and departmental level to meet the particular needs of student groups and the nature of their programmes. Transition support requires an institutional home to ensure that it: remains high on the policy agenda; can support an effective monitoring, evaluation and tracking process; can develop generic guidance; and can promote sharing of good practice and resources across the institution. Institutional first year action plans and first year coordinators are strategies that

universities in Australia and North America, for example, have used for some time. These strategies are now beginning to be established more widely in the UK in response to retention strategies.

Transition support needs to be targeted at all students, not just those 'at risk'. Its success should be measured not just in terms of student retention, but also whether students are equipped with the skills and disposition to achieve their full potential as they proceed through their programme.

16 How transition support can be enhanced to facilitate student engagement and empowerment in the first year: recommendations for policy and practice

Consideration of the key features of effective transition through the review of literature and consultation process has generated a number of ideas as to how HEIs might make changes to their approach to transition support in order to more effectively engage and empower students. Many of these recommendations reflect existing good practice and emerging developments. The recommendations relate to policy and practice and are directed at senior managers and policy-makers, academics and practitioners, and student officers and student associations.

16.1 Policy level

Sector-wide collaboration is needed to agree threshold levels of transition support and develop good practice guidelines. Practice currently varies across the sector, which means that the quality of the student experience varies among and across institutions. Since transition support is not directly linked to competitive advantage, institutions could feasibly collaborate in addressing this issue. A minimum standard threshold for transition support should be agreed by universities in order to generate good practice guidelines. A national debate on this issue that also engages partner stakeholders - schools, colleges and the community - may be a useful vehicle for developing such guidelines.

The first year as an area of policy and analysis needs to have the same prominence within institutions as other policy areas, such as the research agenda. Transition and progression strategies should be integrated within an institution's business model. Institutions need to acknowledge that change which will enhance the first year experience in terms of supporting the transition of all students will require time, resources and commitment.

The development of strategic, coordinated institutional approaches informed by research is needed to ensure fundamental cross-institutional impact. Institutions need to track, analyse and understand patterns of progression and retention, which will vary across the institution, schools, faculties, departments and programmes, in order to develop appropriate responses and approaches. This is likely to require changes to practice and culture in terms of the university's pre-entry role, the nature of the curriculum and the nature of support services.

The challenge of staff engagement should be addressed through establishing a sense of ownership, responsibility and recognition by staff of transition as a 'problem' that needs to be solved. It is necessary to:

- persuade by example, supported through providing more effective processes that enable staff to showcase and share practice and approaches across institutions and develop communities of practice involving both academic and support staff
- support learning and teaching development through strategic funding
- build recognition of innovative approaches to first-year teaching into reward and career progression processes.

A multilayered approach to supporting transition is necessary and requires coordination at a central level. In order to respond to the needs of a diverse student population, a range of approaches towards support in a variety of formats is required. This should involve partnership working with coordinators or champions at faculty/school and department level and with support services staff.

Support systems need to establish an appropriate balance between a proactive approach and student choice and autonomy. Students should not be compelled to engage in support processes, but support needs to be visible, normalised and viewed as part of mainstream activity. This perception needs to be endorsed by teaching staff and reinforced through integrating the development of core and reflective skills and learning strategies within subject-based provision.

Transition support should be predicated on an enhancement rather than a deficit model, which recognises and builds on the strengths, skills and prior experience of students on entering the first year. In terms of skills development, this process should start with initial identification and valuing of what students can already do, rather than focusing on what they cannot do. Enhancing students' self-confidence as learners should be the objective of this process. Personal development planning is clearly an effective means of promoting this approach.

Greater investment in the first year through frontloading of resources is needed for creating a supportive environment and more learner-centred experience, to ensure the successful transition of students into the next and subsequent years of their programmes. This is linked to the need to address the 'borderline pass': the middle band of students who do not fail, but do not fulfil their full potential or fully engage with the university experience. Greater resources would enable programme staff to develop more manageable, learner-centred models of learning and teaching. Frontloading the first year would require a reallocation of resources from years three to five, but would generate more resources overall if retention rates were improved through this greater investment in the first year.

Greater recognition of the pedagogy of teaching in the first year is required.

Teaching staff need to be supported, through initial and continuing professional development, in gaining an understanding of transition issues and how they can be addressed in teaching and learning strategies. A pedagogical approach to the first year needs to underpin curriculum design and review, and first-year teaching needs to be

valued and recognised as a high-status activity, with associated recognition of staff engaged in this area. Involvement of staff in this core activity, whether teaching, development work or research, should be rewarded through pay and progression.

The role of students as 'co-producers' of the university experience should be encouraged through learning and teaching policy and quality enhancement processes that use a range of different mechanisms for staff-student liaison and partnership working. Such staff-student collaboration should include genuine dialogue between the university leadership and the students' association in achieving the institution's key strategic priorities, such as improving transition, progression and retention.

The pace and nature of the first year should be changed to enable the development of metacognitive skills, learning strategies and core and reflective skills within the context of subject discipline. This requires a rethinking of programme structures and curricular content, as well as learning, teaching and assessment processes, within the context of an institutional discussion on the nature and purpose of the first year. The focus of a changed approach to the first year should be to more effectively equip students with the skills, learning behaviours and confidence to successfully proceed onto subsequent stages of their programme and achieve their full potential.

16.2 Practice level

Improved communication between schools, colleges and universities is essential to address the generic issues of transition - for example, preparation for HE study - but also in relation to particular subject areas that experience difficulties with retention, such as science and engineering. What curricular changes can schools and universities make to ensure better engagement by students in these subject areas? Schools also need a better understanding of the way in which different universities teach the same subject, in order to guide and prepare students prior to entry.

Greater collaboration by schools, colleges, community learning providers and universities is required in providing pre-entry support. For example, a summer school for all students is an idea that many practitioners have suggested. Preparation for university pre-entry via joint school/college and university programmes, as well as summer schools, should be broadened out to begin the induction process for all new students. Partnership working is vital, as supporting transition is not just the role of HEIs. There is a need to build on the different strengths of the partners, which include a wide range of educational providers - schools, the community and colleges. Universities need to listen and learn from these partners and not simply view them as recruitment feeders. The Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP), for example, provides a 'safe place' for colleges and universities - particularly within the context of its curriculum groups - to consider and review issues and approaches.

Greater recognition is needed of diversity as a critical issue for transition support. Understanding is required of the different needs, goals, motivations and expectations of students - which will vary across the institution, schools, faculties and programmes - to ensure that transition support is informed by research and reflects evidence-based practice.

There needs to be more effective monitoring, tracking and student evaluation to enable swift follow-up and early intervention, and to track educational pathways and understand patterns of transition and progression, and the student first year experience. What is required is the use of institutional and programme data from student management information systems, monitoring mechanisms and the use of VLEs, qualitative evaluation, streamlined record systems and a willingness to share information across and between institutions.

There should be greater emphasis on formative assessment within programmes early on in the first semester, as well as tailored feedback and tutorial support, so that induction into the autonomous approach to learning required at university is embedded into curriculum design. A focus on formative rather than summative assessment in the first semester is more likely to enhance the learning experience through encouraging 'risk-taking' in project-based and enquiry and discovery-focused learning activities, rather than 'playing it safe'.

Curriculum design should have a greater focus on the interactive dimensions of learning and the social experience of students: for example, working in small groups and more enquiry-based and project work. It should also provide a **more challenging learning experience** to encourage greater engagement and the development of independent learning and high-level critical skills.

Institutions need to explore the most effective mechanisms for creating better informal networks for learning and guidance. Informal and social networking, peer support, peer mentoring and buddying systems play an important role in supporting social and academic integration as well as student engagement and empowerment.

There should be greater sharing of intellectual control with students by encouraging the development of independent learning skills and considering approaches for negotiated and personalised learning, in terms of both content and mode.

Students should be empowered through transition strategies that help them to achieve a high level of self-efficacy in terms of finance, accommodation, core and learning skills, understanding expectations and delivering accordingly. Proactive intervention should be developed and delivered in terms of the key competences required to succeed in the first year. Access to support at timely points during the year should be in a format and at a stage that suits the student through the use of online resources and information, rather than by relying on student support staff.

Part 4

17 Ten case studies

A number of the examples of practice referred to in this report have been developed as case studies, which are presented below.

The case studies were identified through the web-based research, workshops on the Transition project at the HEA Conference in November 2006 and the Enhancement Themes Conference in March 2007, information sent to the Project Director following an email request to the First Year Experience Enhancement Theme's main institutional contacts, and a request posted on the Enhancement Themes website. Some of the case studies were developed through a consultation meeting or telephone interview, while others were based on written information supplied by the case study contact. The source of each case study is indicated.

There is a range of innovative and interesting examples of practice in transition support across the Scottish HE sector. The case studies included here provide a representative sample of these. They reflect key transferable features of effective transition support, and illustrate the ways in which some of the recommendations made in this report for how such support might be enhanced can be put into practice.

Summary and contents list of case studies

- | | | |
|----------|---|-----------|
| 1 | GOALS Top-Up Programme
Pre-entry preparation for students in schools with low HE participation rates. Programme equips pupils in S5 and S6 with skills needed to succeed in HE. Sessions in schools run by GOALS tutors and campus visits | 61 |
| 2 | Glasgow Caledonian University: 'Passion for Fashion' programme
Gives S6 school pupils the experience of university education. Starts in the second week of the school term and lasts 28 weeks. Successful completion of assessments results in an award of achievement which gives participants exemption from a first-year module at GCU if accepted as a student on the BA (Hons) Fashion Marketing or BA (Hons) Marketing and Retailing. | 64 |
| 3 | UniSmart programme
Used in universities throughout New Zealand, Australia and the UK to support the personal transition of new students. Programme takes the form of a 75-minute dynamic presentation which encourages students to seek help early, opens minds and builds empathy for fellow students. | 67 |
| 4 | Queen Margaret University: QM Advance and QMConnect mentoring project
QM Advance - three-day pre-induction course with a series of follow-on sessions in the first semester. Aims to 'assist identified groups of new students to make a smooth transition to university life and study'. Targeted at two specific groups: mature students and direct-entry students. | 69 |

Focuses on supporting new students to develop their knowledge, skills and confidence to help them become more effective learners. **QMConnect mentoring project** - managed centrally by the Transition and Pre-entry Guidance Adviser in Student Services. Project supports new undergraduate students (including direct entrants) during the transition period by matching them with more experienced students who have volunteered to offer peer support.

- 5 UHI Millennium Institute: Developing a longitudinal approach to induction** 74

Developing a longitudinal approach to induction (pre-entry, orientation, semester 1, semester 2); a 'timeline' information strategy, coordinated institutional framework and institutional 'home' for transition (resources, policy, sharing of practice and material).
- 6 Spirit of Creation: Student-focused extended journey mapping** 80

Used by two universities in England to understand issues associated with transition, retention and progression from the student perspective. Data from this exercise have been used to change approaches to transition support in relation to practical, social and academic issues as part of strategic development.
- 7 University of the West of Scotland, School of Computing: proactive school-based support through a Student Liaison Officer and pair programming** 86

Introduced to improve development of programming skills and peer support among first-year Computer Science and Computer Games Technology students. Also, proactive school-based support model for transition which centres on the role of the Student Liaison Officer. The SLO acts as a 'one-stop shop' for all students, whatever their difficulty. The SLO coordinates induction, the buddy scheme, attendance monitoring and resit support within the School.
- 8 Napier University: First Year Experience - Issues in Health and Social Care module** 88

Transition into an HEI setting for adult returners. Focuses on engagement with the university learning process as well as learning outcomes within a large-group teaching model.
- 9 Glasgow Caledonian University, School of Nursing, Midwifery and Community Health: The Enhance programme** 92

Development of scholarship skills and academic and social integration through interactive student-focused activities and use of reflection as a tool for personal and professional development.
- 10 University of Strathclyde, Strathclyde Business School (SBS): Management Development Programme** 96

Compulsory for all SBS students. Addresses key aspects of transition to first year. Centres on group teamwork activities, for which students receive regular feedback, and encourages peer support networks and friendship groups. Incorporates PDP as well as the development of employability skills, and benefits from employer engagement and sponsorship.

Case study I

GOALS (Greater Opportunity of Access and Learning with Schools) Top-Up Programme

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Source of case study: consultation meeting with Lorraine Judge and Neil Croll; extracts from the GOALS Top-Up Programme Student Handbook 2005-06.

Brief description of project/development/practice

The Top-Up Programme is part of the GOALS project, which is designed to encourage young people in the West of Scotland to enter higher education. The Top-Up Programme team works specifically with S5 and S6 pupils in GOALS-participating schools (43 secondary schools in the West of Scotland with historically low HE participation rates and their associated primary schools). The Top-Up Programme is organised by the University of Glasgow on behalf of all the GOALS HEIs in the West of Scotland. It is the final element of activity for pupils who have had the opportunity to experience GOALS elements every year from P6 onwards. The programme is a preparation course for higher education for students who are applying or considering applying for HE courses. It focuses on the development of independent learning skills and critical and conceptual thinking through providing pupils with the experience of a 'mini higher education course' (GOALS, 2005).

The programme aims to: help to prepare pupils for higher education through developing the key critical skills to be successful learners; introduce pupils to university campus life; boost their confidence in their own abilities; help them to make a smooth transition to student life; and help them to decide if HE is the right option for them at this time.

The programme runs from December to March. There are 13 sessions, 11 of which take place within school and two at one of the participating HEIs. The sessions are led by GOALS Top-Up tutors, who are postgraduate students. The sessions cover time management, note-taking in lectures, reading and research, preparing for a seminar, and planning and producing a written assignment based on a small research project.

The first campus session involves attending a lecture, which gives pupils the experience of a large lecture theatre and the opportunity to practice and then review the note-taking skills they have learned. The lecture is given by one of the tutors on an interesting

topic, and pupils use the Personal Response System³ through a feedback session on the different note-taking methods. The quality of this lecture experience is high. The second campus session involves taking part in a seminar, discussion on general university life with current undergraduates who are acting as undergraduate mentors, and IT and library skills. Pupils are also given the opportunity to undertake scientific investigations.

Based on assessment of three main areas (overall performance, preparation and participation in the seminar, and the written assignment), the Top-Up tutors complete a student profile for each participant. The profile is graded on an A-D grading system. Student profiles graded B and above in all three main areas are sent to admissions officers in the GOALS universities/colleges and some other non-GOALS institutions. Many admissions tutors take these three B and above grades into account if pupils achieve a lower grade in a Higher (eg if they achieve a C grade instead of a required B grade).

The postgraduate students who act as Top-Up tutors undertake training and use the comprehensive Top-Up resource pack which underpins the sessions. They work part-time and spend half a day a week in each school to which they are attached.

Aims

The key aim of the GOALS Top-Up Programme is to support pupils from schools with low HE participation rates to develop the confidence and skills necessary to make a successful transition to university. The cultural, academic and institutional barriers facing students from GOALS participating schools are explicitly addressed in the programme.

It is recognised, however, that university might not be the best next step for some pupils, so routes into Higher National Qualifications at college are also explored. However, this can represent a longer, more expensive route to achieving a degree.

Evaluation of practice

The West Forum tracking project - Students in Transition - has monitored the progression of GOALS students at university and college. Owing to initial difficulty in tracking students in colleges and HEIs, this project was extended to January 2008. Students who provided feedback as part of this project considered that they had accurate expectations regarding the management of their time, what to expect in lectures, and their workload. The Top-Up evaluation is available on the GOALS website (www.goals.ac.uk). The Top-Up Programme appears to be an effective vehicle for supporting school pupils in learning the essential skills required for university, and for providing them with an experience of different teaching and learning methods and different learning environments.

As part of an evaluation of the retention and progression of first-year engineering students at the University of Strathclyde in 2005-06, the data indicated that there was no difference in performance between GOALS pupils and other pupils. Research conducted at the University of Glasgow from 2001-05, comparing students from GOALS schools who had completed Top-Up with students from comparative schools who had not, showed that the ex-Top-Up students were performing better in terms of passing exams and were less likely to withdraw from their course.

³ A classroom voting system in which students use remote controlled handsets to answer questions posed by the lecturer in a lecture environment.

Further developments

It is hard for schools to replicate the university experience, particularly in terms of lectures. To enable pupils to gain a real understanding of university prior to entry, outside staff and a university environment is necessary. The fact that the Top-Up tutors are young and are also students has had a major impact in terms of the programme's success. Logistically, however, GOALS Top-Up cannot be offered to every school as the programme is currently funded. There are 43 participating schools in the West of Scotland, and a physical limit on the number of Top-Up tutors the programme can employ each year - the maximum number is around 70. Accommodation within HEIs is also limited, which restricts the number of pupils who can take part in lectures and seminars at times that do not encroach on their study time in school.

The GOALS programme fills a gap that pupils in participating schools may experience in terms of their background and support network. Funding is required for the programme to continue beyond July 2008.

As a result of the evaluation process each year - by tutors, contact teachers and pupils - aspects of the resource pack and activities are changed or revised (for example in relation to generic skills guidance and question content for the written assignment). The time management of each session is a big issue, given the intensive nature of the programme, and this is examined every year.

The Top-Up team piloted a community forum for Top-Up pupils on the GOALS website from December 2006, to help to overcome social isolation. Through the forum they can ask questions of current undergraduates. The forum contains FAQs and blogs of experience. It is hoped that the forum will continue to support GOALS students as they progress into HE. In 2007-08, the web forum is being offered as an integral part of the Top-Up Programme from the beginning.

What are the transferable key features?

- pre-entry support programme
- effective collaboration between universities and schools.

While it would not be feasible for all schools to offer a full GOALS Top-Up Programme, elements of the programme could be developed to provide all school pupils with greater preparation for HE. This could include GOALS-type activity days, campus visits and activities targeting parents as well as pupils. Many universities already run pre-entry summer schools, which could be extended to a wider number of students if sufficient resourcing were available.

LEAPS (Lothians Equal Access Programme for Schools) provides a similar programme, with similar selection criteria for participants.

For further information

Contact Lorraine Judge, Director, GOALS Project (judg-ps0@wpmail.uws.ac.uk) or Neil Croll, Director, GOALS Top-Up Programme (n.croll@admin.gla.ac.uk).

GOALS website: www.goals.ac.uk

Case study 2

'Passion for Fashion' - fashion brand retailing programme for S6 pupils

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Source of case study: consultation meeting with Grete Birtwistle; HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) evaluation report, February 2007.

Brief description of project/development/practice

'Passion for Fashion', a fashion brand retailing programme, began as a pilot for S6 pupils from Glasgow schools in August 2006. It was funded jointly by the Hunter Foundation, the Scottish Government (Determined to Succeed Division), Glasgow City Council and Glasgow Caledonian University. In 2006, 29 pupils from 12 Glasgow secondary schools and one school in East Renfrewshire attended the course. In 2007, the Scottish Government funded the course entirely. Glasgow City Council funds pupils' travel and lunch costs.

'Passion for Fashion' is designed to give school pupils a flavour of the fashion and retailing industries and an introduction to university education. The programme starts in the second week of the school term and pupils attend the university for one day a week for 28 weeks. The course also includes a fashion retail industry placement during the October week holiday. Placement positions are provided by West Coast Capital/the Hunter Foundation, and the placement experience is evaluated by GCU. Pupils choose to undertake this programme in addition to their school coursework. They are recruited through liaison with Enterprise teachers within the schools and an open day to which teachers and pupils are invited.

The course takes place between 09.00 and 15.00 and includes sessions on employability skills, lectures, seminars and workshops. The four themes explored in the programme are: 'What is the role, function and meaning of fashion?', 'Making fashion: where does fashion come from?', 'How does fashion retailing work?' and 'What makes a fashion retailer successful?'. The programme attracts both creative and academic pupils. Direct teaching involvement by GCU staff in the fields of fashion, retailing and marketing is two hours per day. All other inputs are provided by a dedicated tutor using materials developed in collaboration with GCU staff.

The programme promotes the development of independent learning skills through its learning and teaching activities, which support the pupils as they progress to higher

education. GCU provides a customised room on campus for the pupils; it has a plasma screen for PowerPoint and other presentations, laptops for each pupil and wireless internet connection.

On successful completion of all four assessed pieces of coursework, pupils gain an award which is a 20-credit module at SCQF level 7. This allows full exemption from one first-year module if they are accepted as a student at GCU on the BA (Hons) Fashion Marketing or BA (Hons) Marketing and Retailing.

Aims

Recruitment to retail programmes is a national problem. The Hunter Foundation is keen to support such recruitment, and the programme was developed as a feeder to GCU's retail degree programme to help to ensure sufficient student numbers. Many of the students, however, prefer to pursue fashion marketing, business or design rather than retailing.

There are insufficient well-skilled people in the workplace in the retail sector. Skills development in this area is being driven by the Scottish Government and the Sector Skills Councils - Skill Smart and Skill Fast.

The aim is to provide pupils with an experience of university study, give them an exciting and challenging learning experience, and help to prepare them to make a successful transition to a degree programme.

Evaluation of practice

- The pilot programme was evaluated by HMIE in February 2007 and received a very positive report. The pupils were 'well-motivated, attentive and fully engaged in their studies. Almost all are interested in pursuing a career in this field and they feel this provides an opportunity to prepare them for entry to further education' (HMIE report, 2007). The programme was also evaluated through focus group discussions with pupils and meetings with teachers.
- Pupils were provided with the opportunity of mixing with pupils from other schools with different profiles, which will support social transition onto a degree programme later.
- The pupils considered that there is generally a lack of preparation for HE within schools. Teaching styles in schools are highly directed and do not help to prepare students in developing the skills they will need at university.
- The pupils enjoyed being treated as adults and the greater freedom of the university environment. GCU staff and teachers noted a significant increase in the pupils' maturity as they progressed through the programme. It was noted in induction to the degree programme that those who had participated in this programme were more mature and confident than those students who had not.
- There were attendance difficulties during the pupils' preliminary exam period. This has now been addressed through explicit recognition of this problem within the programme scheduling. The lecture schedule is run twice, to ensure that pupils do not miss out on programme activities.

What are the transferable key features?

- The model and its teaching and learning approaches could be extended to: other subject areas that may be facing difficulties in recruitment and/or retention and in which there is no Higher/Advanced Higher provision; or where the opportunity to develop the core learning skills required at university is not available within a school context; or where a more challenging, engaging approach to a particular subject may attract more interest in study at degree level. Areas where this approach might be of particular interest include science, built environment and engineering.
- Awarding a university module (SCQF level 7) on achievement enables students who proceed onto a degree programme to use the credit in a meaningful way.

For further information

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Case study 3

UniSmart programme - Supporting transition to the university experience

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Source of case study: information submitted by Trudi Urlwin of UniSmart.

Brief description of project/development/practice

UniSmart™ is an initiative developed in New Zealand with the primary purpose of easing transition for first-year tertiary students. UniSmart aims to provide students with the tools to make it through the often tough first year and go on to achieve the qualification they seek. Since 1999, UniSmart has developed content in response to ongoing dialogue with university clients throughout New Zealand, Australia and the UK. Some universities have been booking the programme annually for eight years.

The programme takes the form of a 75-minute dynamic presentation. Upon booking, universities are provided with a questionnaire in order to have the content tailored to their specific needs. By naming tough, hard-to-talk-about issues, the presentation encourages students to seek help early, opens minds and builds empathy for fellow students. This is a major factor in creating more supportive and responsible student communities.

A sample of issues covered includes: accepting diversity, personal safety, sexual behaviour, drink spiking, date rape, public nuisance, alcohol and drug abuse, study habits and self-worth. However, UniSmart is not a 'don't do this, don't do that' lecture. It is 'a high energy performance blast of serious content, street theatre tactics, whip cracking, sound track, lighting and comedy'.

As UniSmart uses such a fresh and contemporary format, it can relate effectively to young students. UniSmart is therefore a key strategy for instigating the change of traditionally negative behaviours. Students who find settling into university the biggest challenge of their life so far may be helped by experiencing this presentation.

What are the transferable key features?

- An approach to induction support that focuses on the personal and social transition of new students.
- Use of a dynamic approach that promotes positive, socially responsible behaviour, but does so in an accessible and non-patronising manner.
- The programme can be tailored to the specific needs/issues of the institution.

For further information

Contact Trudi Urlwin (trudi@unismart.biz) with any enquiries or to receive a hard copy of the DVD.

Case study 4

QM Advance and QMConnect mentoring project

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Source of case study: extracts from Murray, J, (2003) *QM Advance 2003 Summary report*. Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh; extracts from Murray, J, (2006) *QMConnect Peer Mentoring Project*. Evaluation report 2005/06, Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh; telephone interview with Landé Wolsey.

Brief description of project/development/practice

QM Advance

QM Advance is a three-day pre-induction course with a series of follow-on sessions in the first semester. It is funded from the Widening Participation budget. QM Advance aims to 'assist identified groups of new students to make a smooth transition to university life and study'. The programme is targeted at two specific groups: mature students and direct-entry students. It focuses on supporting new students to develop their knowledge, skills and confidence to help them become more effective learners. All new QMU students are sent information about QM Advance with their joining pack: a leaflet explaining the aims of the course content and a light-hearted quiz to help those interested to assess whether the course would be of benefit to them. A number of students also find out about the course at an earlier stage, through the Transition and Pre-entry Guidance Advisers, attendance at QMU applicant open days and at local college FE-HE information events.

The course introduces students to key members of student services staff and concepts through an informal, non-threatening approach (Murray, 2003). Within the course, existing students - many of whom were previous participants - act as student guides.

Students who participate in the QM Advance course can opt into a number of follow-on activities in semester 1:

- IT workshops delivered by City Connect trainers at the Corstophine and Leith campuses (internet and email; Microsoft Word; PowerPoint)
- learning skills sessions
- QMConnect Mentoring project

- informal links with members of staff within student services; the Transition and Guidance Adviser and the Student Learning Adviser operate an open-door policy. QM Advance students act as ambassadors for these services and offer information and advice to other new students.

QMConnect mentoring project

This was established in 2002 and is managed centrally by the Transition and Pre-Entry Guidance Adviser, Susan Bird in Student Services. The scheme is primarily funded from the Widening Access Retention Premium. It supports new undergraduates (including direct entrants) during the transition period by matching them with other more experienced students who have volunteered to offer peer support.

All new undergraduates receive initial information within their joining packs about a month prior to the start of their first semester. The scheme is also marketed to specific groups who have been identified as likely to benefit from the scheme. These include: school pupils from non-traditional backgrounds (those involved with the LEAPS summer school), access course students (studying on one of the SWAP local access courses) and QM Advance participants. These students get an opportunity to sign up before the scheme is opened up to all new students. This enables project staff to target specific priority groups while ensuring that other students are not excluded.

In QMConnect's first year of operation (2002-03), five students were matched with mentors. This grew to 12 in 2003-04 and 40 in 2005-06. Since the scheme covers all four of QMU's academic schools, the total number of students involved from each school is quite low. The mentee and mentor pairs are matched carefully by the Transition and Pre-Entry Guidance Adviser, and if the pairing does not work well there is an opportunity to be paired with someone else. The scheme is contingent upon having appropriate volunteer mentors with whom potential mentees can be matched.

The annual cycle for the QMConnect mentoring project starts in March-May with mentor recruitment through emails, flyers, posters, presentations and academic staff referrals. In May, the first mentor training day takes place (six-hour session). Preparing and posting publicity for mentees and producing Good Practice Guides then takes place in June-July. In August, the enquiries from potential mentees begin and the team starts to process these and organise more mentor training. In September, the second and third mentor training sessions take place and matching begins. Matching continues in October. Progress is checked through emails and some one-to-one sessions with mentors/mentees. In November-December, progress is checked and evaluation carried out. In January-February, planning begins for the next academic year (Murray, 2006).

Resources developed to support the mentoring project are:

- Mentor and Mentee Good Practice Guides
- training day resources and handouts
- fuller evaluation schedules.

Aims

QM Advance

QM Advance aims to overcome the following:

- The perception by mature students and direct entrants that there is a gap in their educational experience which can affect their confidence and, as a result, their progress in the early stages of a programme.
- The underestimation by mature students and direct-entry students of the relevance and value of their prior experience and skills. This can increase their anxiety during transition to HE and make it more difficult for them to make the most of their potential as students.
- Mature and direct-entry students often worry that they will be a 'minority' group within their subject area.
- Mature students may have less time to spend on campus, and direct-entry students have less time to 'get up to speed' with what is going on. (Murray, 2003)

QMConnect mentoring project

- To support the transition experience of new students by providing a supportive and enabling learning environment through which peer mentoring can assist students to successfully adapt to, and gain the most from, university life.
- QMU has a good retention rate and a good track record in attracting students from non-traditional student groups. This project, along with other student support activities, aims to ensure that each student's transition experience is as good as possible and that the university offers a range of means through which they can seek assistance and develop their skills. (Murray, 2006)

Evaluation of practice

QM Advance

Student evaluation has been undertaken through informal daily feedback, session feedback and an evaluation form. All respondents indicated an increase in their confidence as a result of taking part, with most noting a substantial increase. All respondents also indicated a substantial increase in the level of knowledge and understanding of QMU following the course.

For the majority of these students, their indicated level of knowledge and understanding of QMU prior to QM Advance was very low. This lack of knowledge was considered by the programme team to contribute to the feelings of anxiety and lack of confidence expressed by many new students. For some prospective students this may influence their decision about whether to progress into HE. It is hoped that the increasing provision of pre-entry guidance will help to tackle this issue and enable more prospective students to discuss and address their concerns early on (Murray, 2003).

Murray's evaluation report (2003) identified the following as the most useful aspects of the course from the student's perspective:

- study-skills session - especially discussion on essay writing and developing learning skills
- sharing concerns - realising that others are in a similar situation
- meeting other mature students
- gaining confidence
- time management session - students' union
- meeting staff and learning where to get support (library, finance etc).

QMConnect mentoring project

During evaluation of the experience of mentees and mentors, the views and experiences of non-participants (both those who had chosen not to opt in and those for whom a mentor could not be found) and of academic staff members were also sought. The Evaluation report 2005-06 (Murray, 2006) provided a detailed consideration of the findings and recommendations for the future. Some of the main findings were as follows.

Mentees:

- Most mentees had a positive experience and all would recommend the project to future students.
- Mentees felt well supported and appreciated having someone to 'turn to'.
- Most felt that they had integrated well or quite well into the student community, and just under half believed that mentoring had contributed to this.
- 65 per cent would now like to become mentors.
- The total demand for mentors from new students exceeded the supply of available mentors. However, in some schools it appeared that the project may have reached its maximum participation level.

Mentors:

- Many mentors had been mentees initially, and once they became involved with the project students tended to stay involved.
- The majority of mentors had a very or moderately successful mentoring experience.
- Those partnerships where mentors and mentees had met on at least three occasions tended to be rated most highly. Those where they met less often or where the mentee appeared to be uninterested often left mentors feeling disappointed.
- Mentors recognised the valuable personal and employability skills they were developing and enjoyed the sense of fulfilment they got from helping someone else.
- The majority of mentors felt that the training and ongoing support they received were 'about right'.

Further developments

- The aim is to develop the QMConnect mentoring project further in order to enable any student who would like to have a mentor to participate.

- Current experienced mentors are offered the opportunity to assist the coordinator in delivering the mentor training sessions and to help to recruit and inform prospective mentees and mentors about the project (Murray, 2006).
- All mentoring pairs are now encouraged to have at least three meetings within the first six weeks of the semester, and the issue of nurturing and developing the relationship now features more strongly within the mentors' training session. This change will be monitored and evaluated to see if it has any significant impact on the number of meetings and on the success of mentoring as rated by mentors/mentees (Murray, 2006).
- By obtaining more information from prospective mentees at the initial stages, the recruitment and matching stages of the process will be able to select those mentees who would benefit most from being involved (Murray, 2006).
- The intention is to open the QM Advance course to any students (not just mature students), including international students, and to develop longer versions of the course and/or a greater number of courses.
- Additional resources from the Widening Access Retention Premium may support rolling out of these programmes to more students.
- Student services, accommodation and the international office are all working more closely in the development of QM Advance as well as induction week.

What are the transferable key features?

- All institutions could carry out these programmes as part of transition and retention strategies.
- **Generating a sense of belonging to university and to peer group before university programme commences** QM Advance brings new students together and provides the opportunity to meet existing students (student guides) and staff. The three-day course provides a foothold, and ensures that the participants are not so overcome by the huge rush of students arriving on campus at the start of the semester. The PDP process is introduced during QM Advance. All students are being encouraged to use the online PDP package which has been developed.
- The QMConnect mentoring project **supports social transition** by providing access to an existing student group as well as meeting other new students.
- QMU has a **coordinated institutional approach to supporting transition and retention**. Its Transition and Induction Group organises transition and brings together a wide variety of people from across the university to look at the issue of induction. The meetings of this group include academics, student services, library, IT, accommodation, international office, admissions, health and safety adviser and school managers. The aim is to catch those who are most vulnerable in terms of progression and retention as well as to support the successful transition of all new students to QMU.

For further information

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QMU student services website:

www.qmuc.ac.uk/prospective_students/student_services/default.htm

Case study 5

Developing a longitudinal approach to induction at UHI Millennium Institute

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Source of case study: telephone interview with Evelyn Campbell; extracts from Campbell, E, (2006) *Easing Transition. Paper No 1: Improving induction for non-traditional students*. Inverness College: UHI; Campbell, E, (2007) *Improving induction for non-traditional entrants. Phase 2*. Inverness College: UHI; Campbell, E, and Morrison, I, (2007) *Enhancing Induction for Non-Traditional Students*. Inverness College: UHI.

Brief description of project/development/practice

UHI appreciates that progression into higher education is a challenging experience for all students and part of a major life transition that involves learning new skills, meeting new friends and changing lifestyles. Well-planned, well-coordinated induction can help to alleviate many of the problems associated with this transition and assist students in adapting to the new HE environment.

UHI provides access to university-level study through a partnership of colleges and research institutions throughout the Highlands and Islands, and a network of learning centres in some of the most remote areas of Scotland. Many students study at a distance using learning technologies such as audio-conferencing, video-conferencing and VLEs to enhance their learning experience and allow social interaction with their fellow students and tutors.

This type of delivery presents additional challenges as students not only experience the traditional challenges of entering HE, but also the potential problems associated with geographic remoteness and isolation. The profile of entrants to UHI illustrates the large number of non-traditional students: two-thirds of UHI undergraduates study part-time, almost three-quarters are mature entrants and 44 per cent live in the most geographically deprived postcodes in Scotland. The nature of the student population and the different modes of course delivery make it even more important that longitudinal induction helps students to become comfortable within HE and engaged with their course as soon as possible.

The collegiate nature of UHI poses a challenge to ensuring that all students have an equitable experience as partner colleges often have their own systems for induction, which can result in variance in the nature, quality and level of support for new students. As part of ensuring equity across partners in terms of the learning experience, UHI has been reviewing and enhancing induction processes and developing a longitudinal approach which explicitly addresses all aspects of transition: social, personal, cultural and academic (figure 3).

Pre-entry	Orientation	Semester 1	Semester 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full and accurate course information • Clear contact names • Open days • Interviews/pre-entry guidance • Skills audit, pre-entry support provision (eg summer school) • Information about finances, childcare, accommodation etc. • Information tailored to needs • Information in variety of formats • Timely provision of information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social and academic orientation • Meeting with student adviser 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supportive first-year learning and teaching strategies • Progressive study-skills development • Ongoing transition support • Ongoing academic support • PDP • Tracking of students to help early identification of at-risk students • Evaluation of induction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As semester 1 • Preparation for transition to year 2 • Evaluation of first year

Figure 3: components of longitudinal induction at UHI (Campbell, 2006)

The induction project at UHI has comprised two phases.

Phase 1

The first stage of the project began in January 2006. The aims were to:

- review current national and international literature relating to induction
- identify existing practice within UHI
- stimulate discussion within UHI on the importance of induction
- promote reflection on current practice throughout the UHI network
- identify areas for improvement
- document and disseminate good practice⁴.

⁴ Extract from Campbell, E, and Morrison, I, (2007) *Enhancing Induction for Non-Traditional Students*. Inverness College: UHI.

An audit of existing induction practices within UHI partner colleges was performed through questionnaires, interviews with programme leaders, meetings with groups of students and a search of relevant documents (eg QAA subject reviews, course reports, evaluations). The information gathered identified current areas of good practice, but also showed where improvements were needed to enhance the student experience and aid transition into and between levels of HE. The meetings also confirmed that positive changes would be welcomed by both staff and students (Campbell and Morrison, 2007).

The recommendations from Phase 1 of the project included:

- A **longitudinal approach** to induction starting from point of enquiry until the end of the first semester/first year. The audit showed general agreement that this approach would be beneficial. However, change would need to be carefully planned and introduced over a period of time. Change would require staff to 'buy into' the role of induction in supporting students making the transition to HE (Campbell, 2006).
- A **centrality index/timeline**, to help to ensure consistency in the nature and timing of induction support.
- The **location of an 'institutional home for induction'**, to coordinate, monitor and review activities across the institution and encourage sharing of good practice. Such a home would require the power to initiate change, drive policy and allocate a budget. Campbell recommended that UHI establish an 'institutional home' to coordinate all aspects of longitudinal induction. In this way, Campbell argued, transition programmes should become part of mainstream institutional policy. This is especially critical in a multi-campus/institution context such as UHI, where the issue of equity is particularly challenging to coordinate.
- **Improved internal communication by different departments involved with induction.**
- **Sharing of resources and development of generic UHI material.**
- Improving induction support through encouraging the development of **peer support groups and peer networking**. Social integration and supporting engagement with other students is a key issue for UHI in terms of enhancing its induction support. For those students who are geographically remote and engaged in online distance learning, their only campus experience may be during induction. The emphasis of face-to-face induction needs to shift from formal provision of information to one focusing more on team-building activities that help students to get to know each other. Some excellent examples of practice in UHI should be shared more widely across the network.
- A **move away from a deficit model** of induction support to one that values and builds on existing strengths and skills. Non-traditional learners often have low self-esteem. Before they are ready to embark on degree-level study they need to raise their self-esteem and feel worthy of being in HE, as well as upgrade their skills. Summer schools should be investigated as a strategy to explore this dimension of pre-entry support.

Feedback within UHI indicated that staff and students would welcome improvements to the induction process as a means of enhancing the student experience and supporting transition to HE. Campbell (2006) recognised that within UHI there were many examples of excellent practice, but without centrally coordinated sharing of practice and resources there was a danger of duplicating work. Campbell also recommended establishing monitoring mechanisms to ensure accurate and timely reporting of:

- admissions (background of students, identifying specific needs)
- progress (early identification of 'at risk' students)
- withdrawal (identification of reasons)
- evaluation of induction/transition. (Campbell, 2006)

Further funding was released to implement these recommendations.

Phase 2⁵

Creation of an institutional home

The role of UHI induction coordinator was created primarily to lead implementation of the recommendations made during Phase 1 of the project. This provided a centralised 'institutional home' for the coordination and implementation of change. The role also involved liaising with different groups involved in the induction of first-year students and continuing to promote the importance of induction/transition.

Workshops were held at the UHI staff conference 'Engage, Reflect, Inspire' to encourage staff from different backgrounds to work together to identify potential beneficial changes to their induction practices. Similar presentations were also made at programme leaders' meetings and subject network days.

Having an institutional home has encouraged dialogue and helped to create a central point for issues relating to transition.

Student Journey Working Group

A cross-departmental Student Journey Working Group (SJWG) was formed with representation from academic partners and all departments that play a role in induction/transition, such as marketing, admissions, Student Association, student support, academic staff and learning and information services. As well as working towards longitudinal induction and a shared timeline, the SJWG has identified issues related to transition and raised them in the relevant forums. This has improved communication among departments, fostering shared ownership of transition activities, and has helped to share experiences across partner colleges.

Online induction website

The induction website will help to extend induction into the pre-entry and post-entry phases, as information is available for access prior to the start of programmes and also for later recall. In addition, the website will help to standardise generic induction information, giving equity of experience across academic partners and courses. The

⁵ Extract from Campbell, E, (2007) *Improving induction for non-traditional entrants. Phase 2*. Inverness College: UHI.

site is intended to complement traditional induction, freeing time for social integration during face-to-face induction (for example, group-work activities to foster communities of learning). Students are alerted to the site by programme staff and by letter when they receive their course joining instructions.

Before release, the site was reviewed by a small group of students and programme leaders and positive feedback was received. The establishment of the site has been used as evidence of standardisation of information at subject reviews and validation events.

The site is being piloted during the academic year 2007-08 and will be subject to ongoing monitoring and evaluation. It will be comprehensively evaluated at the end of the year. If the site has been effective in aiding transition, it is hoped to develop it further with, for example, the addition of an introduction to e-portfolio personal development plans, direct links to faculty and course information, and video clips giving students a voice. This will require investment and release of resources, so the site's effectiveness must firstly be carefully evaluated.

Common centrality index/timeline

A clear timeline has been developed identifying the type, source and timing of appropriate material. This will help to establish a longitudinal approach to delivering information, preventing overload and duplication. This 'drip feed' approach will also serve the purpose of maintaining contact with prospective students, thus helping to 'keep the customer warm'.

It is hoped that after consultation the partner colleges will adopt the timeline as a guide for entrants starting the 2008-09 session, progressing equity of provision across partner colleges.

Further developments

Although Phase 2 of the project did not involve developing an induction policy, the establishment and adoption of an institutional policy on induction - with key principles and minimum standards - would again help to establish common practice.

An initial draft of suggested principles and minimum standards has been prepared after considering current practice in different colleges and programmes and reviewing literature of best practice. This draft needs to be carefully scrutinised, aligned with the new UHI learning, teaching and assessment strategy, changed where necessary and, if agreed, put through relevant committees for adoption in time to be included in planning for the academic session 2008-09.

Campbell and Morrison (2007) have used Krause's model (figure 4) to identify the way in which recognition of the importance of an integrated strategic approach to induction has developed within UHI to date, and to indicate how the process of change can continue:

The challenge to put some of stage one recommendations into practice has been exciting but the greatest difficulties perhaps lie ahead. The coordination and compliance of 15 partners will be difficult to achieve and may take several

years to establish. The impact of changes will need to be carefully monitored and induction programmes regularly evaluated and reviewed to ensure that they meet the needs of our students. (Campbell and Morrison, 2007)

What are the transferable key features?

- a longitudinal approach to induction
- timely provision of information through the use of a centrality index/timeline approach
- a strategic, coordinated institutional approach
- sharing of good practice and resources
- providing an equitable student experience of induction
- collaboration with different staff groups and student representatives to develop approaches
- supporting the development of peer support groups and peer networking to support social transition
- establishing effective monitoring mechanisms to inform and improve transition support
- using an 'enhancement' rather than a 'deficit' model of transition support.

For further information

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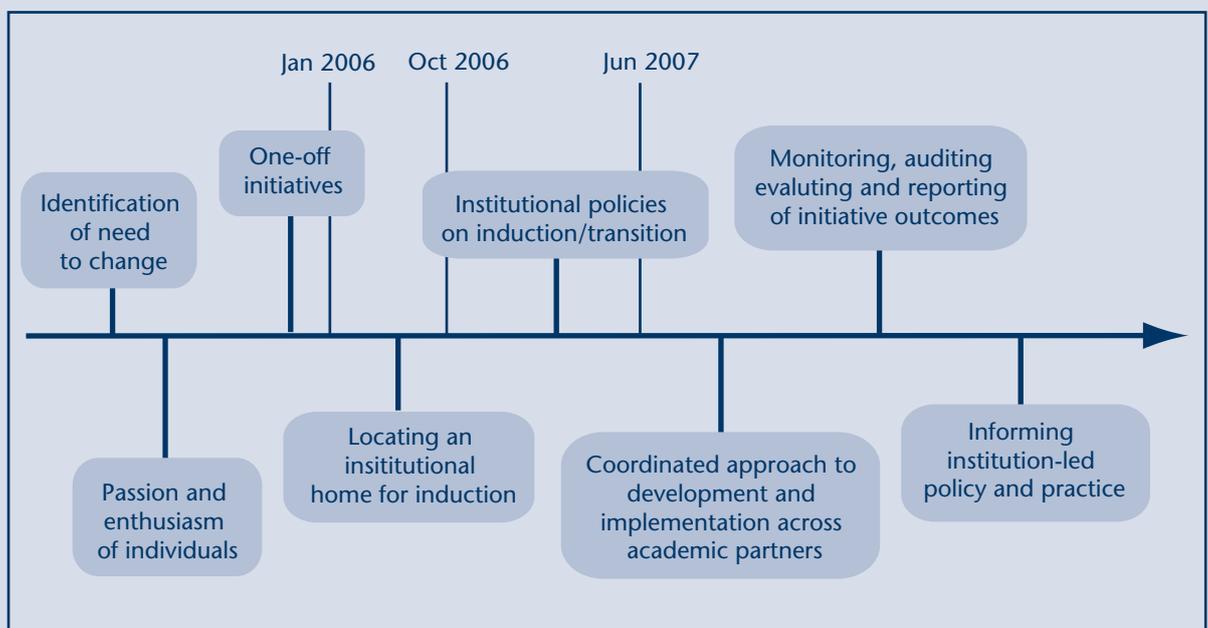


Figure 4: continuum model of the development of first-year initiatives (adapted from Krause, 2003)

Case study 6

Student-focused extended journey mapping - informing strategic change

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Source of case study: telephone discussion, and information sent by Kevin Gavaghan.

Brief description of project/development/practice

Service design and the student experience

The company Spirit of Creation (SoC) is working with universities to apply the principles of service design to understand and improve the student experience. As part of a service design process, SoC uses student-focused extended journey mapping based on the 'extended customer journey' mapping technique. Student-focused extended journey mapping has been used by two universities in England to understand issues associated with transition, retention and progression from the student perspective. The data from this exercise have been used to change existing approaches to transition support in relation to practical, social and academic issues as part of strategic development.

What is service design?

Service design brings to services all the combined elements of research, marketing, analysis, blueprinting and business planning that are usually applied to goods and products. With a high focus on design, delivery and implementation, service design imposes a rigorous and disciplined process.

Service design uses the following sets of tools in a unique framework that provides teams with the means to de-compose, analyse and recompose the issues underlying a complex service problem. These tools provide a way for a team to step systematically through interlocking and conflicting issues and requirements and work out the trade-offs.

DGSE participative and team-based stages in disciplined and rigorous order:

- Discovery - field and desk research and analysis
- Generation - ideas generation
- Synthesis - criteria-based winnowing of many ideas down to a few
- Enterprise - blueprint of new service with business plan = financial rationale.

Extended customer journey:

- A customer-focused process map (often with storyboard)
 - all stages of the individual's journey through a service
 - emotional status of individual making the journey
 - information status of individual making the journey
 - overlay of D1-D3 design perspectives on all stages of the journey.

D1-D3 design perspectives at three levels, participative and team-based:

- D1 - design at the level of form and detail; touch points and channels for new services
- D2 - design at the level of systems and processes; ICT, procedures and organisational structures
- D3 - design at the level of policy, to guide/align teams and their work.

Supporting institutional strategic change: transition support through student-focused extended journey mapping

In the educational context, service design tools are used to shape then define, specify, launch and manage new models of student experience. One model perfected by SoC with its client university incorporates new ways to combine fun and friendship, connecting and networking with the traditional aims of qualification and employability. The extensive use of new techniques for student-focused extended journey mapping has helped SoC's clients to real success with transition and progression in higher, further and secondary education.

University Welcome - the student experience programme

In 2005, the new Vice Chancellor of SoC's client university assessed the impact of the key drivers in the national and educational environment:

- economic
- social
- technological
- legislative
- pace of change itself.

The Vice Chancellor commissioned 11 reviews which used the SoC methodology. The outcome was a recommendation to set up a series of service design projects under the label 'Student Experience Programme'. The aim of the programme was to tackle the underperformance reflected in recent National Student Surveys (NSS), where it appeared that fundamental student needs were not being fully met, nor patterns of expectation and behaviour set for:

- fun, growth and life learning
- friends, connections and networks
- qualifications
- employability.

Detailed but swift analysis showed that in specific terms the university was doing a poor job from the very first day of the first term. The result in 2005 was that 21 per cent (1,400) of the 7,000 undergraduates arriving on 15 and 16 September had left the university by Christmas the same year. This confirmed poor indicators in the NSS and other internal and omnibus surveys, and was further indicated by the evidence of little interest of staff.

A Welcome Weekend project was commissioned with a series of service design workshops which identified the major contextual factors, key groups at risk and most important issues affecting students on arrival. Once the student-centred process mapping started, it became clear that there was a lack of coordinated central policy, systems and processes, and very few 'touch points' for staff and students.

One team in the university identified the time and resources of key people, who were then persuaded to devote time in sessions to ideas generation across service department and faculty boundaries. In the process these idea-generation teams became familiar with the 'grammar' of service design (grammar: finite set of rules from which to derive an infinite number of sentences) and were able to identify many student experience issues, both generic to HE (such as the importance of way-finding for freshers) and specific to the university.

In 12 weeks, the Welcome Weekend team observed and analysed current methods and processes, brainstormed services to fill the missing gaps and began to develop the first blueprint with pictorial support in the form of storyboards. As each stage was designed, the university marshalled and shifted resources to ensure that the necessary components were sourced and assembled with all the precision of a military or engineering operation. Where necessary, trade-offs between time and money were agreed and the end result was a brilliant Welcome Weekend.

The many elements of the Welcome Weekend were not new, but it was the organisation and sequencing of them that was different. The main elements included:

- an invitation to the Welcome Weekend
- timetables, maps and guides
- directions to the campus and car parks
- marshals to ensure that everyone went to the right place on arrival
- hundreds of student ambassadors, properly briefed to meet and greet the 7,000 newcomers and families and significant others
- student baggage handlers to lift luggage into new accommodation blocks
- scheduled meetings with faculty staff
- introductions to the job shop, financial help centre and student services, including careers
- entertainments and hospitality, including food, drink, music and opportunities to socialise, aided by lanyards and badges for accommodation and faculties to help with recognition and introductions. Also a Big Brother-style chair for public reflections, karaoke, hot-air ballooning, etc.

Service design activity

There are three principal forms of service design activity:

- short service-design event (6-8 hours)
 - output - list, prioritised
 - focus
 - consensus and motivation
- second, longer service design event (8-16 hours)
 - repeat discovery > generation > synthesis > enterprise in detail
 - output - a project outline
- service design project
 - could last three days
 - could last three months
 - could last 13 months
 - repeat discovery > generation > synthesis > enterprise in more detail
 - bigger team
 - across more boundaries
 - output - a project plan, with detailed blueprint and business plan, including: market/segment; proposition; processes; people; place; promotion; and performance measurement.

Aims

Two universities have used SoC's service design tool-sets to establish users' needs, generate fresh ideas and qualify those ideas with the best potential outcome. The aim was to develop a programme for transformation backed by a rigorous business case (including new performance metrics for services) combined with an implementable blueprint for redesigned or innovative services to meet the evolving need in all education for:

- more successful transitions between educational strata and between years
- new peer-group learning to assist transitions and progression
- better designed employer engagement and employability
- better retention and completion ratios
- improved returns on funding, at individual and institutional level
- a shift from a 'deficit' to an 'enhancement' model.

Evaluation of practice

The service design project for the Welcome Weekend has had the following effects.

Immediate benefits:

- smoothest possible transition
- hugely impressed students, parents, significant others
- also very positive reactions from student ambassadors, administrative and teaching staff who supported and participated throughout
- Value recognised by students' union and university
- lasting and positive effect
- £130,000 savings in procurement, avoiding duplication of paper, brochures, printed materials commissioned by four different parts of the university and sourced from seven to eight different suppliers working to different brand specifications.

Further benefits:

Undergraduate Welcome Weekend extended to:

- Welcome Week and now Welcome Month (mainly online) for the 30 days before start of first term
- Welcome Week and now Welcome Month for the 30 days (mainly face-to-face) immediately after start of first term.

Medium-term benefits:

- open days completely redesigned to reflect learning of Welcome Weekend
- open days' programme now plotting transitions and progressions and promoting 'whole journey' over three years
- graduation days now being redesigned and shortened, better events for less cost
- undergraduate welcome (UK domestic) now copied for: undergraduate international; postgraduate UK; postgraduate international; part-time - personal; part-time - continuous professional development; and clearing.
- culture and ethos now permeating all faculties and services teams in the university
- student approval scores shifting upwards
- attrition rate down to nine per cent in January 2007
- small positive shift in NSS scores
- positive brand shifts in university.

Further developments

Two parallel projects - Graduate Development Programme (GDP) and Employability - reinforce transitions and progressions:

Graduate Development Programme

- a) peer to peer, facilitated learning
- b) progression from level to level carefully planned to shift resources to areas of need

Employability

- c) closely integrated with GDP are a series of Employability research and development projects, where service design techniques have been used to develop a prototype now in test with a Confederation of British Industry evaluation panel.

What are the transferable key features?

- Development of a strategic approach to supporting transition through applying a robust and rigorous process to identify and understand the key issues and problems surrounding transition for a particular institution's student population, and identify solutions and an implementation plan. The process comprises research, marketing, analysis, blueprinting and business planning.
- Collaboration of key staff groups and student representatives through involvement in all stages of the process.

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Case study 7

Proactive school-based student support through a Student Liaison Officer, and pair programming

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Source of case study: information supplied by Stephanie McKendry; extracts from McKendry, S, *Student Support Activities for Session 06/07*. School of Computing, University of the West of Scotland.

Brief description of project/development/practice

School-based student support: role of Student Liaison Officer

The School of Computing has 600 full-time students (undergraduate and postgraduate). A Student Liaison Officer was recruited in December 2004 to improve student support in the School, following concerns about retention and progression. Most importantly, the SLO acts as a 'one-stop shop' to all students within the School, whatever their difficulty. The SLO is far more available to students than other staff (such as personal tutors or module coordinators) and liaises with academic and central services to provide the appropriate support and advice that students may require.

The SLO coordinates induction and appears as a named contact for students from the moment they are welcomed to the School. An intensive induction is provided for all new students in the School. A student helpdesk is also made available to all computing students for the first two weeks of semester 1, providing information, assistance and directions to all new students. Extended induction sessions continue throughout semester 1 on topics such as 'Surviving the First Year', assessment and plagiarism, and revision and exam skills. All students in the School are sent email fact sheets following the sessions to ensure that they are aware of regulations and procedures.

The SLO also operates the attendance monitoring system and arranges interviews with students with poor attendance. Clear routes of support and referral, via personal tutors and additional labs, are determined and advertised to students. All new students complete a diagnostic programming questionnaire, and the SLO is given information about coursework submission and class tests to target contact to those most in need.

The School participates in the university's 'Student Buddies' project, which aims to provide first years who applied through the clearing process with a more experienced student mentor. The mentors note any difficulties or concerns expressed by new students and pass on information to the SLO, who determines if action should be taken.

Resit support is offered to all students after the semester 1 exam diet. This initially takes the form of a 'traffic light' mailing. Students with good results are congratulated, those with one resit are advised of resit procedures, and those with more than one resit are asked to make an appointment with the SLO. Further resit support is provided immediately after the semester 2 diet.

The SLO also coordinates the School's student representation system.

Pair programming

Pair programming was introduced in the current academic session to improve the development of programming skills among first-year Computer Science and Computer Games Technology students. In the core module, Introduction to Programming, students were put into pairs and expected to work together to complete lab tasks. Students were initially reluctant, and one student insisted on working alone. However, the majority soon became used to working this way and seemed to enjoy it. The tutor felt that they worked harder, wasted less lab time (surfing, checking email) and got to know one another much more than in previous years.

There are no definite data yet, as this scheme was only trialled for the first time in semester 1 of the current year. However, initial impressions among staff and students have all been highly positive. The tutor involved has continued to teach the students in a later module and feels that they are a more cohesive, socialised group than previous cohorts.

What are the transferable key features?

- A proactive model of school-based support for transition which is responsive, resourced and coordinated and involves collaboration with school academic staff and central services.
- A 'one-stop shop' model within a school which provides an easily identifiable and accessible source of support that is particular to the needs of students within the school.
- By making support more visible and normalised, and by monitoring and following up attendance, problems which may lead to lack of progression or withdrawal can be dealt with at an earlier stage.

For further information

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Case study 8

Supporting the transition of first-year nursing students: the First Year Experience - Issues in Health and Social Care module

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Source of case study: module information sent by Jane Brown, Napier University. This module is also a case study for the First Year Experience Enhancement Theme development project on 'Curriculum design for the first year'.

Brief description of project/development/practice

This module is one of four core modules that make up the first trimester for first-year students on the pre-registration nursing programme. The module was revised in 2001-02 to provide greater emphasis on adult learning, student transition into an HEI setting, student engagement, the learning process and outcomes.

The module is delivered in a highly structured format each week, including discussion groups with the same lecturer, who is also the students' academic adviser for the module. Teaching input and assessment are mapped against module learning outcomes corresponding to the weekly classes. The students are given a comprehensive module handbook with detailed assessment, supervision guidelines and specific learning outcomes for each class. Creative academic support and considerate timetabling are used to support students with caring responsibilities and to allow flexibility for different learning styles.

The module handbook is used throughout the module to encourage students to engage with the module content and take responsibility for managing their own learning, in order to promote the transferable skill of self-management.

Class contact time is three hours each week, and the same lecture theatre and classrooms are used each week. Where possible, the same lecturer facilitates the same group-activity sessions each week. This is designed to encourage students' security in their new setting, thereby enhancing confidence to communicate effectively with their peers and lecturers at an early stage - an important transferable skill.

In the activity sessions with students, the teaching methods used require students to learn in a thoughtful, responsive manner in cooperation with others. The key transferable skills promoted in this part of the module teaching are the abilities to clarify personal values, learn independently and cooperatively, listen actively, persuade rationally, and work productively in a group.

The assessment strategy takes the form of a learning log. Students submit nine short pieces of work (150-200 words) for the log, relating to the module's learning outcomes. There are strict but creative guidelines for academic support. The learning log focuses on articles or tasks for students to summarise or make comment on, at an appropriate level for their understanding, topical, relevant to all the branch nursing programmes and easy to access from Napier University libraries and the Internet. This encourages engagement with the assessment by stimulating interest. The questions are also designed to promote class attendance.

A major focus of the learning log is to promote early development of the transferable skills of academic writing, information retrieval and technology skills. To accompany the learning log, the Napier team has developed comprehensive supplementary guidelines which are helpful to students. These have been devised over time as a result of student evaluation.

Rationale for learning and teaching strategy:

- encourages student confidence, as students know what is expected of them from week to week regarding rooms, lectures and teaching staff
- range of learning activities gives students an early opportunity to interact with peers and build relationships with lecturers
- enables students to engage with module material and appreciate their own experiences and how these are relevant to future roles
- promotes group interaction across branch programmes, and clarification of student values
- enables students to anticipate and interact with module content and take responsibility for their own learning.

Rationale for assessment strategy:

- promotes early engagement with assignment
- relevance of assessment to module content clear for students
- promotes early information retrieval and technology skills
- early identification of students with special needs or particular problems
- supports student success at early stages in their programmes.

A particular challenge with the module has been providing academic supervision and feedback according to students' individual needs in such large groups with a small module team. The assessment is not a standard essay and for the students it is their first experience of a written assessment in their chosen nursing programme.

Feedback to students in this module is both formative and summative. The module offers a flexible approach to students when offering academic support as formative feedback, recognising that the students have different styles of learning and communication, are very new to the university, and may find it difficult to approach lecturing staff.

Formative feedback to students is offered in three ways during this module:

- a named academic supervisor being available after class for students to hand in work and get feedback a week later
- email contact with named academic supervisor; feedback within five working days
- attendance at learning log preparation and finalisation sessions; immediate feedback.

Aims

For many students this module is their first experience of an HEI and therefore they are potentially vulnerable. The challenges addressed by the module are to:

- provide a more supportive introduction to the university experience within the context of large-group teaching (250 students per module)
- support the development of transferable skills to build confidence and enable successful engagement
- address the needs of adult learners with a broad range of age difference, life experience and ability.

Evaluation of practice

The key methods used to evaluate the module have been student feedback and assessment results.

Student evaluation - actual and typical quotes:

- Tutorials were on a more personal level and easy to do group work.
- Made me think more about the different aspects of health.
- Learning other views, seeing my views differently.
- Changing my attitudes.
- That the lecturers have acknowledged there is more to nursing than practical caring skills.
- Made me think and consider controversial topics.
- I liked the fact that it was a one hour lecture, then an activity group afterwards; it made it more interesting and fun.
- Was fun and lecturers made you feel welcome and learnt a great deal.
- I enjoyed the way it was presented as a fun/easier learning log. It broke the work load down and made it easier to complete.
- Assessment style - easy chunks.
- I found the academic support excellent and the classes were very well organised.
- Feedback for academic work was useful and quick.
- I was offered guidance and help in my learning

With the old module assessment tool there was a failure rate of 13.5 per cent and a mean mark of 51 per cent. On the first running of the new module assessment tool, the failure rate was 1.6 per cent, with a mean mark of 70 per cent. Subsequent results have been similar. The learning log has enabled students to succeed early on in their course - an important retention challenge.

In terms of evaluating the development process for the module, the Educational Development Unit at Napier provided support. The Unit valued this work and encouraged the module leader to continue developing the learning, teaching and assessment of the module with the first-year student experience in mind. The main barrier was attitudinal: the perception of first-year teaching as low status. First-year core modules are perceived as 'servicing' separate degree programmes and are often allocated to the most inexperienced or least able lecturers.

What are the transferable key features?

- Early staff and peer interaction through the learning and teaching strategy within the context of large-group teaching.
- Recognition of the needs of mature students in terms of confidence-building and gaining clearer understanding of university-level learning.
- Early feedback on assessed work supporting the development of skills required for successful achievement.
- A team of experienced lecturers who are committed to working with first-year students and can empathise with their difficulties. It is important to be creative, clear and fair when implementing academic strategies/ground rules, particularly in large-group first-year cohorts, to enable students and staff to enjoy the learning experience.

For further information

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Other sources:

Napier University Staff Conferences, available on www.napier.ac.uk

Case study 9

The Enhance programme

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Source of case study: consultation meeting with Nicky Andrew and Gerry Reid.

Brief description of project/development/practice

The Enhance project began with a 2005 pilot comprising targeted academic support sessions in the first year of the Midwifery degree programme. These sessions took place throughout the first year on a 'long, thin' basis. A truncated two-week intensive version was piloted in the Operating Department Practitioner (ODP) programme.

Focus groups were held with students and staff to gain feedback on the skills sessions and identify what needed to be included in the first-year curriculum in terms of academic skills development. The sessions were amended accordingly, and in September 2006 the Enhance programme was launched in the School. All first-year students in the School undertake it. This represents 500 students undertaking the programme over two semesters. Six topics are explored in the Enhance programme, which is of 12 hours' duration in total. Groups of 25 students from across a first-year programme work together throughout the year.

The Enhance programme is based on small-group activities. Group tasks centre, for example, on problem-based learning, learning styles and enquiry activities relating to nursing theory and practice. As skills development is contextualised within a health discipline, students perceive the activities as 'meaningful' and as providing them with a good grounding in scholarly/academic practice. The programme is supported by the Blackboard VLE and is intended to front load the student experience in order to promote social integration, cultural security in a new learning environment, and the independent learner.

The timing of the sessions ensures that their topic aligns with students' module curriculum. For example, the session on referencing, annotating and bibliography is undertaken at the point when students are preparing their first written assignment for their modules.

The School continues to resource the programme, and the material is becoming embedded within revised modules to enable full integration into the degree programmes in Nursing, Midwifery and ODP in the future. The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy group within the School is responsible for supporting the embedding of Enhance into the curriculum. The programme is delivered by the academic staff teaching first-year modules.

Initially, staff interest in developing the project was low, but when Enhance was launched across the School an effective marketing strategy for students was employed, supported by donations from companies: goodie bags, UHBs, books, raffles, a lottery entered through use of the Enhance website, and stethoscopes. This enticement strategy ensured that everyone was aware of the programme and encouraged high take-up. The launch generated a successful 'feel good factor' among first-year students and staff teaching first years. Prior to this, a lot of groundwork had been undertaken in gaining staff support for Enhance through discussion in module and programme team meetings and representation on programme boards.

Aims

- To explore the ways in which people learn and how a student's background can affect attitudes to, and styles of, learning.
- To support progression and retention. In the pre-registration nursing programme, only 50 per cent of the student population was going to the second exam diet (ie either choosing not to sit or failing the first diet). Nursing students were experiencing difficulties in essay-writing, for example. Student support was uneven in the School, and in some cases too much support was being provided in terms of 'coaching for success'. There was general lack of achievement of the 'independent learner'.
- To explicitly encourage the socialisation of students in a learning environment. A high number of 'non-standard entry' nursing students, as well as mature students, require support in their academic and social transition to the university environment. Social, cultural and economic issues affect the successful transition of these students, in addition to academic skills. Some 80 per cent of the students are first-generation university students. The key driver for these students is to embark on a nursing career, rather than to gain a university degree. The socialisation process is more complex for students who did not necessarily intend to go to university. Moreover, the majority of students are combining work and full-time study.
- The focus of progression supported by the programme is the enhancement of all first-year students in terms of achieving independent learner status and better results.

Evaluation of practice

The project was based on an action-research model in which one cycle generated another:

- Cycle 1 - Enhance Academic
- Cycle 2 - Enhance Clinical
- Cycle 3 - Enhance Virtual.

Evaluation of the programme has been continual and multimethod, through focus groups, questionnaires, a conference and ad hoc feedback, both formal and informal. Evaluation of the first cycle provided positive feedback from students, who tended to appreciate the value of Enhance later on in their degree programme rather than at the time.

Staff feedback has also been positive. Initially, staff were wary of involvement in terms of the extra work it might involve and whether the Enhance programme was being forced on them. However, the support material for the sessions required little additional preparatory work by lecturers. It contains highly detailed lesson plans and prompt notes so that each session is a self-contained unit. A library of resources is also being built up and sited on Blackboard, including videos of sessions. The intention is to set up a rigid framework which can be adapted by staff as it becomes progressively embedded within the programme.

As a result of engaging in the Enhance project, staff are now more positive about involvement with other action-research and scholarly activity within the School. Enhance has therefore helped to raise the profile of scholarly activity in the area of learning and teaching within the School and will, in turn, capitalise on this increased interest in subsequent developments.

Evaluation by the School's senior management team has also been positive. The project managed to undertake a significant development with a small amount of funding. The School is now resourcing the Enhance programme leader and programme lecturer on a permanent part-time basis.

The project team operates on a 'shared leadership' basis with equal voices and quick decision-making. This democratic model has underpinned the successful working of the project team.

Further developments

Cycle 2 is Enhance Clinical, in which the programme is being rolled out into clinical practice. The focus is the development of skills required to integrate theory and practice. The 'soft skills' which are the focus of Enhance are contextualised in a clinical environment. This development is being undertaken through partnership working between the university and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. Placement tutors will become key players in the programme in terms of targeting information to placement providers, mentors and students.

Enhance Clinical has been informed by the outcomes of a questionnaire which all first-year students were asked to complete after their first clinical placement, as well as conference focus group discussion by policy and practice stakeholders that centred on three key questions:

- What do you think of the support strategies in existence?
- What needs to supplement them?
- What makes a successful first year?

Enhance Clinical encourages students to apply scholarly practice to activity in a clinical area, enabling them to see the connection between web-searching and what they are witnessing in a clinical setting more effectively. The aim is to support students to more effectively integrate theory and practice when working with a patient, to ensure informed care at point of delivery.

Following successful pilot evaluation and a curriculum review process, Enhance is now being rolled out to all students as part of their degree programme. It has moved from being a project to forming part of mainstream provision.

Cycle 3 is Enhance Virtual, which will be an online publicly available resource. It will contain study-skills exercises, learning styles questionnaires, guidance and assistance with collaborative learning activities. It will also contain student blogs through which reflection on experience can be shared and comments posted. It aims to support a collaborative, vicarious learning model which will help to demystify the first-year learning experience. Further web-based development of Enhance is planned, through Blackboard support.

The programme has moved from being a university-based project to taking in the workings of a clinical area. This involves working with health service providers through a partnership model. It is anticipated that this partnership will generate further spin-offs for the university. Practitioners wanting to access research do not tend to approach academia; Enhance is helping to break down these barriers.

What are the transferable key features?

- Enabling the development of research skills by staff and encouraging their involvement in future research and scholarly activity.
- The flexibility of working in an action-research framework and viewing developments as cycles, which supports the long-term sustainability of the programme. As one cycle becomes mainstreamed, subsequent initiatives or external forces trigger another cycle.
- Successfully targeting the needs of first-year students through explicitly addressing academic and social integration, supported by the programme's learning and teaching strategy.
- Supporting the professional development of academic and support staff in terms of developing a greater understanding of issues surrounding transition support in the first year.
- The programme is transferable to other professional areas in health-related fields, such as physiotherapy and occupational therapy.
- Reasserting that there is an induction and transition strategy, and that second and third-year lecturers need to maximise this strategy in subsequent years.

For further information

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A web-based portal is being developed.

Case study 10

Management Development Programme

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Source of case study: consultation meeting with Aileen Watson and Bill Johnston, University of Strathclyde.

Brief description of project/development/practice

The Management Development Programme (MDP) is a compulsory element of the first three years of degree programmes within Strathclyde Business School (SBS). It developed from the Integrative Studies programme following an extensive review in 2003-04, which included student feedback and consultation with staff and employers. The MDP was launched in 2005.

The MDP embraces personal development planning and the development of employability skills as well as supporting the transition into the first year within SBS. As the programme develops it progressively increases the amount of responsibility and self-regulation of first-year students, but exposes them to this in a coordinated and supportive way.

In developing the programme, staff worked closely with employers to ensure that their expectations regarding graduate attributes and skills would be met. The programme therefore embraces confidence-building; personal effectiveness; management skills, leadership and negotiation; social, ethical and sustainability issues in business; professional values; and project management.

The programme is much wider than skills development. In the first year it focuses on supporting the transition to the university experience and, as it progresses, equips students with the skills of lifelong learning in terms of developing the ability to reflect on their skills and plan for further development. The programme has employers' endorsement and participation by companies which awards prizes for student presentations.

In the first year, the MDP explicitly supports social integration. Prior to registration, students are attached to a team of six which then meets in the first week of the semester (the tutorials for their other modules do not start until week 4). There are 48 students in a group, comprising eight teams of six students. The groups are interdisciplinary, though are all within business disciplines. The groups are led by academic staff from SBS and Department of Statistics and Modelling Science (STAMS). A part-time teaching assistant works with the academic staff and acts as a facilitator.

The initial session is two hours and focuses on icebreaking activities that engage the students in teamworking and getting to know each other. As well as the two-hour weekly group session, students meet one hour a week in a lab session, in which they work on individual numeracy and Excel activities delivered and tested through a VLE. Students work at their own pace and support is provided by two teaching assistants. Initially, the MDP focuses on learning how to do presentations and seeks to develop confidence.

As the year proceeds, there is staged progression in terms of the complexity of the tasks undertaken by the teams. In the first semester, assessment focuses on a PowerPoint presentation, a forecasting exercise and a team project based on topical themes (for example, the impact of the smoking ban and the development of super casinos) which cut across all subject areas and are highly accessible in terms of information-gathering. In the second semester, a holiday project requires students to set up their own organisation, identify a holiday idea and undertake financial projections. The relevance of statistics and IT is demonstrated to students as they seek to resolve real business problems.

The projects demonstrate how challenging the first year can be. Students work in their teams throughout the year and work outside that experience when tackling their holiday project.

The use of web logging is included in the programme and a communal space is provided on the VLE. Students start reflective diaries at the beginning of semester 2. In these diaries they are encouraged to reflect on their first semester in terms of specific projects, their presentation skills, the effectiveness of their team, managing problems and their understanding of the employability role of the MDP.

Administrative web support for the programme ensures logged attendance and automatic emailing if attendance is missed. This enables a pattern to emerge in terms of risk identification.

Aims

At a strategic level, the programme developed post-Dearing in response to the need to equip students for the graduate labour market.

The tension between what university staff can and cannot expect students to be able to do in the first year in terms of critical thinking and synthesis skills was addressed in the programme's development. The knowledge and skills element of the programme required a sophisticated approach to first-year teaching, to which students were initially resistant. The rationale of the programme needed to be addressed and reinforced early on.

The HE/work interface is central from day one. Staff explain to students why they are undertaking the programme and how it fits in with their other learning: taking responsibility for their own learning and their own research; team responsibility; and the ripple effects on their principal subject areas. Students are empowered by understanding the nature and purpose of their degree and in gaining a realistic view of where they are going.

Evaluation of practice

Comprehensive evaluation of the programme takes place, and student and staff views are sought. The programme team uses the data to revise elements of the course design.

Employers endorse the programme as providing an effective vehicle for developing the employability skills they seek in a graduate workforce. They are particularly impressed by the level of professionalism and teamworking demonstrated during the first-year presentations.

There is often some initial student resistance to the interdisciplinary nature of the programme and the emphasis on collaborative teamworking and reflective activities. By the end of the first year, however, students comment positively on the impact the programme has had on developing their confidence and skills as learners, as well as their business-related skills, and the opportunity it has provided for social networking, peer support and developing friendship groups. Many students sustain the friendships developed through their first-year MDP group throughout their university career.

Further developments

There is significant interest within the University of Strathclyde in the MDP as a model that can be transferred to other subject areas. Its interdisciplinary model and explicit use of the learning/work interface to support PDP and the development of employability skills are pedagogically challenging. Such an approach requires sufficient resources to support curriculum design and the development of learning and teaching strategy and staff development, as well as employer engagement and support.

What are the transferable key features?

Supporting the academic and social transition of students through:

- clarifying an early understanding of HE-level learning through formative assessment and feedback
- providing an engaging and progressively challenging learning experience through its enquiry-based, collaborative, small-group work, project-based learning model
- promoting the development of social networking and peer support within the curricular structure
- supporting progressive skills development, including the development of reflective skills, through PDP within a subject context
- supporting the explicit development of employability skills from the beginning of first year and enabling first-year students to understand the value of their degree programme in terms of their future career.

For further information

Contact Aileen Watson (a.c.watson@strath.ac.uk) or Bill Johnston (b.johnston@strath.ac.uk).

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Appendices

Appendix I: list of consultation meetings/events

- Attendance at launch event of e-grow project (Educational guidance to routes and opportunities), SFC Wider Access Regional Forum (WARF) project (15 September 2006).
- Facilitation of workshop on Transition project at HEA Conference, 'Getting Engaged' (2 November 2006), based on key project questions.
- Consultation meeting with Nuala Toman, CRL Student Evaluation Project at Glasgow Caledonian University (6 November 2006).
- Telephone interview with Evelyn Campbell, UHI, on induction/transition developments (6 December 2006).
- Consultation meeting with Gillian Hodge, University of the West of Scotland (12 December 2006).
- Participation in University of Strathclyde's First Year symposium (9 January 2007).
- Consultation meeting with Kenny Anderson, Scottish Wider Access Programme (17 January 2007).
- Consultation meeting with Karla Benske, University of Glasgow, Tracking GOALS Students, WARF project (23 January 2007).
- Case study consultation meeting with Nicky Andrew and Gerry Reid, Glasgow Caledonian University (Enhance programme) (6 February 2007).
- Case study consultation meeting with Bill Johnston and Aileen Watson, University of Strathclyde (MDP programme) (19 February 2007).
- Policy-level consultation meeting with Bill Johnston, CAPLE, University of Strathclyde (19 February 2007).
- Facilitation of workshops on Transition project at Enhancement Themes conference (8 and 9 March 2007).
- Policy-level consultation meeting with Jim Gallacher, CRL and SFC (27 March 2007).
- Policy-level consultation meeting with Anne McGillivray, Centre for Lifelong Learning, University of the West of Scotland (17 April 2007).
- Case study consultation meeting with Lorraine Judge and Neil Croll of the GOALS Top-Up Programme (17 April 2007).
- Case study consultation meeting with Grete Birtwistle, Glasgow Caledonian University (Passion for Fashion programme) (1 May 2007).
- Policy-level consultation meeting with Kenny Miller, SHEEC (16 May 2007).
- Policy-level consultation meeting with Gill Troup, the Scottish Government (21 May 2007).

- Policy-level consultation meeting with Ron Piper, University of St Andrews, First Year Experience Enhancement Theme.
- Case study telephone interview with Landé Wolsey, Queen Margaret University (QM Advance and QMConnect Peer Mentoring programme) (31 May 2007).
- Telephone discussion with Maureen McIntyre, of Personal Development Planning (PDP) in the first year, First Year Experience Enhancement Theme Report (13 June 2007).
- Case study telephone discussion with Kevin Gavaghan, Spirit of Creation (student-focused extended journey mapping) (21 June 2007).
- Presentation of paper on project at CRLI international conference (22 June 2007).

Appendix 2: Quality Enhancement Themes First Year Experience reports

Sector-wide discussion projects:

Gordon, G, (2008) Sector-wide discussion: the nature and purposes of the first year

Kochanowska, R, and Johnston, W, (2008) Student expectations, experiences and reflections on the first year

Practice-focused development projects:

Bovill, C, Morss, K, and Bulley, C (2008) Curriculum design for the first year

Nicol, D, (2008) Transforming assessment and feedback: enhancing integration and empowerment in the first year.

Black, FM, and MacKenzie, J, (2008) Peer support in the first year

Miller, K, Calder, C, Martin, A, McIntyre, M, Pottinger, I, and Smyth, G, (2008) Personal Development Planning (PDP) in the first year

Knox, H, and Wyper, J, (2008) Personalisation of the first year

Alston, F, Gourlay, L, Sutherland, R, and Thompson, K, (2008) Introducing scholarship skills: academic writing.

Whittaker, R, (2008) Transition to and during the first year.

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