

Re-thinking undergraduate students' transitions to, through and out of university



Examples of good practice in GEES disciplines

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Introduction

In 2011-12 the Higher Education Academy focussed upon transitions in higher education as an area for development within the disciplines of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences (GEES) and this resource originates from the inaugural meeting of the *GEES Special Interest Group on Transitions*, held at the Royal Geographical Society in London, in June 2012. The meeting aimed to provide a forum in which GEES colleagues could come together to explore the academic and social aspects of undergraduate students' transitions to, through and out of university. Over the course of the day, conversations ranged across a variety of transitional issues, from sharing ideas about ways to support the transitions undergraduates face, through to scoping out areas where further research was needed. A full report of the meeting, produced by Dr Gill Miller (University of Chester) and Steve Brace (RGS-IBG), is currently available to download from the HEA website¹.

A key outcome from the meeting was the need to begin to establish, highlight and disseminate examples of good practice already taking place within the GEES community. Consequently, in January 2013, a GEES departmental workshop on undergraduate student transitions was held at Newcastle University, where we began to identify and collate such examples². Further research ensued between January and June 2013, and we are immensely grateful to those colleagues who attended the workshop, completed our questionnaire, answered our emails and phone calls, and provided ideas and documents from within their own departments.

This resource is the result of their generosity. Rather than recommending one 'best practice' approach to dealing with each of the transitional issues faced by undergraduate students on GEES degree programmes, it collates a range of ideas that those charged with programme development could incorporate into their institution's existing practices. In terms of broad trends, it is noticeable that many of the interventions designed to aid the transition into university draw upon the concept of an extended induction period – often starting on the day A-level and/or Scottish Highers results are published. At the other end of the spectrum, interventions around employability seem to be the current focus of attempts to improve undergraduate students' transitions out of university³. As you will see, colleagues came forward to provide examples from a wide range of GEES disciplines. While at one level users of this resource might therefore have to adopt a pick-and-mix approach to find ideas from their own particular field, transferability is also a strong characteristic of many of the examples provided on the following pages. We hope that you will find at least some of the ideas useful.

¹ Miller, G. and Brace, S. (2012) *GEES Transitions Special Interest Group Workshop Outcomes*. Available from: http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/subjects/gees/HEA_STEM_GEES_Transitions_SIG_June_2012.

² The report, slides and documents from the GEES departmental workshop on transitions, held in January 2013, can be found on our transitions website: <http://research.ncl.ac.uk/studenttransitions/> (also see appendix I).

³ For those specifically interested in the employability of GEES students, it is also worth noting that in 2012 a GEES departmental workshop on this issue was held at the University of Leicester. Further information and ideas generated at this workshop can still be found on the GEES website at the following address http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/events/detail/2012/15_Jun_HEA_STEM_GEES_Car_Dev_Leicester

Interventions to support the transition to university

Extending induction

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The transition from school to university is a tough one. Our innovation recognises that this tough transition requires much more than just a formal week of induction. At 'Geography@Manchester' we reconceptualised 'induction' as the period from when students receive their examination results and accept their place with us (pre-semester) all the way through the start of the second semester of their first year. This extended period of induction becomes almost an on-going learning practice of induction, rather than a week of 'induction'. In turn, we reframed the first semester of the first year as a space in which the students could learn how they learn – with that learning extending beyond the formal university learning setting as the students learn how to settle into a new city, halls of residence, etc.

Having piloted this approach in 2012-13, the reconceptualisation of the extended induction as a learning practice (rather than just a week of 'induction') structures our welcome practice. This approach to induction is embedded across our Geography programme in the first semester of the first year. Key elements include:

- early welcome;
- induction material;
- pre-registration fieldwork;
- support from second-year geographers;
- formal induction process;
- tutorials as extended induction;
- strong academic advisory support in semester two (and throughout the rest of the degree programme);
- embedded induction in lectures;
- links through to second year of study.

When the students accept their place from us, they receive a congratulatory email. Then they receive a comprehensive induction package with a short 'hand over' video. This is filmed with the academic Admissions Team, congratulating the students on their results and introducing myself as First Year Advisor, who will oversee their first year and be their first point of contact. The 2012-13 cohort suggested that this fostered a positive environment of identity and personal engagement; the 20 emails I received to clarify information, or in some cases literally just to make contact, suggested that staff are seen to be friendly, approachable and welcoming. The induction package also contains a welcome from MUGS (Manchester University Geographical Society), the head of Geography and the key admissions personnel, and some key pre-course material such as readings and the marking criteria. The induction material also contains information about our trip to Keswick.

Geography@Manchester is well known for our pre-registration field course. We take our students to Keswick in the Lake District for a three-day residential fieldtrip before the formal University Welcome Week. In an informal space they are introduced to each other, to members of staff (including their academic advisor), to MUGS and to their second-year peers. In the evenings, as First Year Advisor, I share with the students what will happen during Welcome Week, and I introduce them to the courses and their

free choice options. MUGS and our second years share their wisdom and endeavour to recruit new MUGS. More significantly, they make themselves known to the first years from day one. MUGS and the second years are then on hand throughout Welcome Week; they assist with campus tours, sharing their wisdom from their first year. We have found that the more informal introduction of second years to first years in the relaxed space of the lounge in the field centre initiates the building of lateral links between our years in a more natural manner than a forced 'getting-to-know-you' type session. MUGS further develop these links through shared virtual discussion spaces and social events. After a few days of water sampling, deconstruction of Keswick's tourist identity and being eased into university life, the students return for the formal Welcome Week.

Our Welcome Week is the formal part of induction and talks students through what you would expect – course options, free choice, Blackboard, using the library, tours of the campus, etc. We also introduce learning skills and how learning at university is different from school; this discussion is developed in the students' first tutorial the following week. First years are given the opportunity to become student reps. Again, second-year students are on hand in both a formal and informal capacity to share their wisdom. Building from student feedback, we run two full days of induction, which is heavily supported by MUGS and our second-year students, and give the first years the rest of the week to learn about their new city.

The tutorial programme picks up the induction discussion in week one. In small groups, students discuss learning at university in general and the skills they will learn in particular, which in turn feeds into our employability strategy. Towards the end of week one/beginning of week two, there is another brief year meeting to reiterate messages and clarify procedure. In week three, the students meet with their academic advisor for a one-to-one session to discuss progress to date, set expectations and goals for the academic semester and ease any worries. The academic advisor (who leads semester one tutorials) remains as the students' advisor for the duration of their degree. They meet one-to-one throughout the semester and students complete a booklet that documents their learning, skills acquisition, aspirations, etc. The tutorial programme delivers the skills that students need to induct them into university learning – the practical skills such as referencing, writing essays, etc, but also skills in time management, finding a part-time job, getting a bus pass and so forth. Undoubtedly, this is common practice among all academic departments; the difference here is that this space is seen as one of continuous learning and thus induction into university life. The tutorial programme does not contribute to the students' overall degree classification, enabling them to experiment with different approaches to learning. Each essay, for example, is set with a short piece of reflective writing that encourages the students to analyse the strengths of the essay and areas of possible improvement for the next assessment.

This embedded, extended approach to induction is also supported by the lectures. Lecture staff are asked to support the tutorial programme by reiterating messages about, for example, referencing and accessing essay material. Good communication is key here. As First Year Advisor, I meet with the student reps on a fortnightly basis to gain the student insight into how the long-term process of induction is unfolding. In turn, I also make myself available to the lecturing staff to ensure that they are happy with the messages being delivered to the students throughout the first semester.

In semester two, the focus shifts towards course content; tutorials become more like seminar discussion groups but still provide induction-type support with detailed assessment feedback, and student-led sessions returning to skills such as referencing and essay structure. Crucially, the induction practice continues into the second year of study and arguably beyond.

The importance of the second year is highlighted in the students' year meeting in week one. This is almost an induction into the second year and highlights the importance of putting into practice the skills learnt in the first year. In the first semester of the second year, a core module refreshes students in the key skills of essay writing and referencing before they submit a formative piece of assessment. Academic advisory one-to-one meetings continue to provide feedback on examination performance and general learning development.

The innovation here is that, rather than having a week of 'induction', we have extended the induction process and embedded it throughout the first-year curriculum so that it becomes an on-going learning process. Through various practices, this, in turn, fosters an environment of learning how to learn within a friendly, supportive space. The on-going learning practice that is induction is embedded across the entire first semester, from the point that students accept their place with us all the way through to their second year. On top of our more formal welcome materials, such as the induction pack, pre-registration field course and Welcome Week, our induction practice is continued via tutorials, the academic advisory programme and lectures throughout the first year and into the second. There is continuous feedback from the staff and students and heavy support from our second-year students.

Extended induction and peer mentoring

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Bringing the voice of existing students into the induction process for freshers is important because it enables more experienced students to contribute their understanding, experiences and knowledge to it. Reflecting further upon this, Sober (2011) outlines four key benefits for both the new and the existing students involved: firstly, student participation harnesses the knowledge of experienced learners and provides opportunities for them to disseminate this to new students; secondly, it makes self-reflection by existing students more applied and purposeful – and enhances their understanding of the process; thirdly, it facilitates a form of group mentoring between different course levels and student cohorts; and, finally, existing students can be empowered to produce guides and other induction literature which is more accessible to new students.

The *Extended Induction to Geography* pilot scheme has been designed as a series of formal and informal lectures, seminars, workshops, tutorials and mentor meetings, which ran from freshers' week through to its culmination with a first-year residential fieldtrip for staff and students to the Lake District in the fifth teaching week of term. Although many of these sessions were staff-led, here we want to focus upon the role of second- and third-year students acting as peer-mentors within the process.

Despite our fears, recruitment of student mentors was not a problem. In 2012 over 20 existing second- and third-year students initially expressed an interest when the peer mentoring role was first advertised within the department in May. Each was asked to provide the Degree Programme Director with a paragraph explaining why they wanted to take on this role. In theory, this process was designed to enable staff to vet applicants. In reality, it seemed to put off those students who were not fully committed and left us with 21 students, all of whom were dedicated to the mentoring role. Reasons given for volunteering as a mentor were sometimes altruistic, but mainly revolved around CV development and the acquisition of transferable skills. Many (but by no means all) applicants intended to apply for PGCE programmes after graduation and saw the mentoring role as worthwhile additional experience that they could include in their personal statement. However, by the time mentoring began in September 2012, four students had dropped out due to study, employment and sport commitments. This left 17 mentors and provided a ratio of one mentor per ten students. All mentors were volunteers and so the only cost to the department was for distinctive hoodies. Mentors were asked to wear these as much as possible during the extended induction period so that they were clearly identifiable to first-year geography students on and around the campus.

Once trained at two two-hour long sessions in September 2012, student mentors were used to support the geography department's teaching within a first-year core module entitled *Geographical Study Skills*. Delivered in tutor groups of ten students, this module is taught across the first year in the form of one-

hour seminars, once a week. The aim of the module is to provide a transition from the styles of teaching and learning used in schools to those used in universities, by helping new first-year students to acquire the study skills and transferable skills needed to successfully complete a geography degree. As part of the *Extended Induction to Geography* pilot programme, we gave each mentor a clearly defined role, supporting one tutor group each. To facilitate this, mentors led the last 15 minutes of the first four *Geographical Study Skills* seminars. For this to work effectively, and avoid any awkwardness, the member of staff leading the first 45-minutes of these sessions was primed in advance to leave the room. Sometimes mentors used their time with the group to reinforce the key message of the session; sometimes they empathised with the new undergraduates over how different learning at university was compared to at a school; sometimes they answered general questions that the group had been reticent to ask during the first part of the session. Here, student mentors acted as a helping hand, a sounding board to listen to questions and concerns from the new students, while also offering reassurance. The fifth, and final, week of the extended induction period was a trip to the Lake District for all new students. Ideally, we would have taken all peer mentors with us on this trip; however, mentor availability, the number of beds in the youth hostel and cost all prevented this. Instead, we asked for volunteers and opted to take six mentors. The trip was residential and the work the students completed formed part of the first assessment for the *Geographical Study Skills* module. Mentors were given a roving brief – informally mixing, helping and chatting with the first years at every opportunity.

Our extended induction period for new geography undergraduates responded to the thematic priorities established by the Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences (GEES) Subject Centre in 2011. Firstly, it promoted *active learning* and improved *learning, teaching and assessment*. In addition to their regular mentor meetings, students experienced taster sessions offering insights into different aspects of geography. The aim of these sessions was to give each student a rounded view of the discipline's form and scope in higher education, bring the subject matter to life and give students a better understanding of geography's wider relevance and contribution to contemporary real-world issues.

Secondly, the new extended induction programme also contributed to the GEES priority of improving *recruitment, transition and retention*. Student retention has become a pressing issue for universities, as withdrawal rates have an impact on university resources and the overall reputation of the university. Students without support can feel isolated and emotionally destabilised by their new environment. Although in many cases this is overcome relatively quickly, it can also produce a crisis point at which a student decides to withdraw only a matter of days or weeks into their new course. In the light of this, it is apposite to ask whether academic tutors are always best placed to act as guides, particularly when so many of the problems experienced by freshers are not academic in nature. Given their positionality, and the staff-student power relations which ensue, to what extent can academic staff empathise and provide real-world solutions to freshers' problems, without appearing patronising or out of touch? It is perhaps a less daunting alternative for new undergraduates to admit self-doubts to their peers? If so, having the voice of existing students heard loudly enhances any induction process.

Resources

Richardson, M. & Tate, S. (2012) University is not as easy as A, B, C...: how an extended induction can improve the transition to university for new undergraduates. *Emerge*. 4, pp.11-25.

Richardson, M. & Tate, S. (in press) Improving the transition from school to university: introducing student voices into the formal induction process for new undergraduates. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*. Published as advanced copy online DOI:10.1080/03098265.2013.769092.

The A-Z Geography Student Handbook

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We have facilitated a student mentoring/buddy scheme in Geography at Newcastle University for several years. However, in addition to face-to-face mentoring, in 2012 our second- and third-year student mentors asked if they could write *The A-Z Geography Student Handbook*, as a way for existing students to pass practical advice, hints and tips about making the social and academic transition to university onto the new intake of geography undergraduates. A hard copy was given to each new undergrad by their mentor in the first week of term in the hope that this written expression of the student voice would both increase the effectiveness of the mentor meetings and be a useful addition to the usual staff perspective, which has tended to dominate previous induction periods. In the future there will also be an interactive version of the A-Z handbook accessible via Blackboard (Newcastle University's VLE). It is hoped that the combination of the handbook and regular meetings will embed student representation and the student voice at the heart of the induction process. Electronic copies of the handbook are available directly from Simon Tate.

Creating an online space for pre-induction

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Students who have accepted a place on a course within the School are introduced to our School via an email (approximately three weeks before their arrival at university) with the aim of helping students prepare for their transition to university.

The website provides useful information and guidance to help students in the weeks leading up to their move to university and also begins to foster a sense of belonging to the academic community within the School of Earth and Environment. The website includes sections on 'uni life' and 'uni study' to enable students to build realistic expectations but also to enthuse students and motivate them to start preparing themselves academically for the transition to higher level study.

The resource was designed through consultation with secondary school students as well as staff and students from within the School of Earth and Environment; it is therefore designed to meet the specific needs of students on specific programmes within the School (Geology, Geophysics, Environmental Science, Meteorology and Climate Science, Sustainability). For example, details of kit lists and photo story boards prepare students for fieldwork, pre-induction activities are designed to get students thinking about the subject content of their course, and an induction-week timetable and downloadable checklist are available to help with the practical aspects of moving to university. Importantly, students are also encouraged to join the school Facebook group; here they can post questions that current students are happy to answer and also make contact with others within their peer group.

The resource has been in place since 2009. It is managed by the School Student Experience Officer and is updated annually, working with academic and support staff.

A postgraduate version of the resource, Step Up to Masters, was developed in 2010.

Targeted student experience interventions (induction)

On-going research within the School over the past three years has explored the barriers and enablers to student engagement using a combination of focus groups, interviews and surveys. Creating a sense of belonging to the rich academic community of the School has been one of the primary objectives of the work addressing various challenges such as a diverse range of subjects being taught, a large school and very little teaching taking place within the School building. Findings from the research have helped identify that multiple communities exist and engage in different ways and that interventions need to be focused on clear outcomes. Research, and experience, also indicates that interventions that prove most successful are those that are student-led.

An outcome of the research has been the creation of a permanent position within the School for a Student Experience Officer (SEO) as well as paid student experience ambassadors to help deliver targeted events and initiatives.

Initial interventions focused on the student experience during induction week with the aim of informing students how and why they should get involved in co-curricular activities within the School. The School has a number of departmental societies, student chapters (of national and international industry organisations) and student groups (eg sports teams) who provide a varied range of activities throughout the year. These student-led activities have been proven to create a real sense of belonging for students and it is important that new students are aware of these opportunities.

A dedicated session has been introduced into the induction week timetable to explain the importance of co-curricular activities (from the SEO), with an introduction from each of the student groups providing a lively student-led session. This is then followed by a barbeque and a School Societies, Groups and Chapters Fair. New students are able to find out about the various groups and become members as well as talk to staff who attend the event and meet other students. Feedback has been positive about the event and it has helped boost membership of the various groups within the School.

The School induction week programme concludes with a day trip outside of the city that provides an opportunity for students to start thinking about their discipline area through a team activity. For example, students studying Environment and Business, Sustainability and Environmental Management, Environmental Science and Meteorology and Climate Science visit a local reservoir. While walking around the reservoir, information boards have been placed offering an insight into the specific issues faced by the environment (eg golf course development, water discolouration, woodland management). Staff accompany the student groups and encourage discussion, bringing in their own expertise. The student teams are asked to review the redevelopment of an adjacent wind farm and decide whether the wind farm redevelopment should take place. Teams are required to post their responses on the university's virtual learning environment, thereby introducing students to this method of communication, which will become integral to their time as a student in Leeds. Student ambassadors and representatives from the societies join in with the activity and are able to chat informally to first years about what they can expect from their first few weeks in the School.

Resources

www.see.leeds.ac.uk/countdown/SEE

<http://www.see.leeds.ac.uk/stepup>

<http://www.see.leeds.ac.uk/admissions-and-study/student-experience/student-engagement/> Jackson, A. & Livesey, K. (2012) Aligning expectations with reality: an online resource to help with the difficulties of school to university transition and early engagement with higher education. In Andrews, J. Clark, R. & Thomas, L. (Eds) *Compendium of Effective Practice in Higher Education Retention and Success*. Published by Aston University, Birmingham & HEA, York.

Creating a transitional space for new GEES students through pre-induction social networking

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We use a bespoke departmental social network (invite only), created from the Ning platform, for use in the three weeks prior to formal university induction. All new student entrants are invited to join. There is also a high level of staff membership among both academic tutors and support staff. In addition to the details added to the individual student and staff pages, further features include various introductory video podcasts, guidance/articles on preparing for university, discussion forums, induction week information and timetable details.

Evaluation of the impact of this approach shows that social networks can act as a useful transitional space by bringing together aspects of the familiar (the culture of social networking and interacting with others online) and unfamiliar (eg tutors, the requirements of university). Research findings highlight the way this approach encourages familiarity with peers, tutors, the place of study and the university academic experience, with the greatest impact on those with the most anxieties about the transition to university. A distinct role for university-created social networks which complements more open and wide-ranging networks, particularly Facebook, is identified.

Resources

www.ning.com

Ribchester, C. Wakefield, K. & Miller, G. (2012) Creating a transitional space for new students through pre-induction social networking. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*. **36** (3), pp.455-467.

The importance of induction fieldwork

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From being accepted onto the course, every effort is made to build a 'community of practice' with the students. They are members of an online community before the course starts and they are expected to complete pre-course activities, including working in a primary school, before they formally start their training. At the start of the course, building this community of practice quickly is important. Students work together on a range of collaborative activities in the first week in order to support this:

1. First afternoon: fieldwork on a new campus. Students are put into groups (this is significant, rather than self-selecting groups). Their brief is to gain an impression of the campus and together, and by the end of the week, create a 'mini-landscape' of the campus for peer evaluation. The activity is creative, requiring them to use time together beyond formal taught sessions to produce a final product, and they then have to think carefully about the value of the assessment criteria for peer evaluation and also how to give each other feedback that is constructive.
2. We engage the group in a second piece of fieldwork towards the end of their first week. They again work in mixed groups in the local city. Before we go out, they have to read two articles: *Playful Learning* by Louis Rice (*Journal for Education in the Built Environment*, 2009) and *Walking as an Aesthetic Practice and a Critical Tool: Some Psychogeographic Experiments* by Keith Bassett (*Journal of Geography in*

Higher Education, 2004). The focus of the work is to participate in an exercise around the local city using cards and activities to enable them to see the city through a new set of geographical lenses. The intention is to encourage them to think about different possibilities for fieldwork and also to enjoy working together.

3. Again, within week one of the course, the students undertake further group work. They collaborate with history PGCE students to develop a series of 'market stalls', presenting their experiences and newly developing understanding of the place of geography and history in the school curriculum – the focus here is the primary school experience they have gained before coming on the secondary PGCE course. This process enables the students to appreciate the cross-curricular nature of their disciplines, the significance of primary school students' engagement with geographical ideas for secondary school teachers and also the opportunity to work with PGCE students in another subject at an early stage of the course.
4. All students complete a pre-course task, 'How I learned geography'. They are expected to engage with academic literature on geography education and consider, critically and analytically, their own learning of geography both within the formal confines of educational settings and beyond school.

In some respects, these activities, as standalone activities, might seem interesting and enjoyable; however, their significance is as a collective. Together they are intended to achieve several objectives:

- relatively quickly building a community of practice among the geography students;
- setting, in practical ways, the expectations of the course as participatory and professional;
- encouraging student teachers to begin to see how school geography can be very different from the way they were taught;
- challenging, at an early stage, some stereotypes about teaching (as opposed to learning) geography, and to locate 'reflection' at the centre of professional development.

Using first-year undergraduate tutorials to embed a new geographical culture

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As part of our programmes in the Geography and Environment area at Northumbria University, we run a 20-credit, year-long tutorial module for our first-year undergraduates. Through a mixture of regular, small-group tutorials with designated tutors, directed and independent learning, this module aims to develop the key skills required for effective study within the Department. Learning and assessment activities are tailored towards the student's own degree programme with reference to substantive core modules, thus providing an appropriate subject context for study. The tutorial module also aims to consolidate the process of induction onto the Department's degree programmes and thus to support the student's transition from further to higher education. As part of this shift in culture, students will be able to take responsibility for their own learning and, by reflective practice, develop ways of monitoring their own academic performance and progress. The module is assessed by essay (60%) and short portfolio-based assignments (40%).

What makes our tutorial support system innovative is that it is embedded within the curriculum as a recognised module, and is sufficiently flexible and adaptable to be tailored to the students' programme-specific needs.

Resource

See Appendix 2.

Developing geographical skills

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Our first-year students undergo an intensive and personal induction, which leads into a comprehensive skills unit and opportunities to build important relationships with each other, tutors and lecturers and myself as Director of Student Support.

The transition to university level is built upon formally through the unit 'Geographical Skills'. This unit has consisted of twice-weekly supervisions (student groups of four-eight, in both semesters), weekly lectures (semester one), locally-based fieldwork week and a self-awareness assignment. Skills can only be 'taught' by ensuring that students see the relevance through direct application, and so all lectures/essays/supervision discussions are related to one or both core geography units being taught that semester; this ensures not only constructive feedback on writing degree-level essays, for example, but also subject-specific feedback, which would otherwise be impractical given the large year one lecture groups. The lectures include areas such as academic integrity and referencing, reading and note-taking, writing at degree level, critical thinking, feedback and group work and making the most of lectures. A week of fieldwork occurs in week six, not residential as it is based in and around Southampton and the New Forest. All students do a physical, human and integrated (GIS, RS) day and then present posters and have pizza on the Friday. This again allows for both academic and personal development. Presently, students also do a SMART goal assignment where they set themselves two personal/academic goals for semester two and record progress on a blog, before summarising their insights at the end.

Teaching critical approaches to reading and writing

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'Planet Earth' is a module comprised mostly of first-year undergraduate geology and earth-science students at the University of Manchester. The students have an assignment to read a six-eight-page article (one of over 25 journal articles, usually from *Geology Today*, on a preapproved list) and write a one-two-page essay summarising the article in their own words. These essays are marked with an initial score (Excellent, Acceptable, Unacceptable, Zero), then returned to the students to make revisions. The criteria for these scores are provided to the students at the beginning of the course. After teaching a course in 2011 where numerous students plagiarised content from their reading despite having been given traditional educational content on avoiding plagiarism, a different approach was decided upon in 2012. This new approach emphasised a positive approach to critical reading that implicitly avoided plagiarism rather than punitive approaches that focused on plagiarism. Students surveyed found the material useful and claimed that it helped improve their writing. More improvement is believed possible in the future. More exercises to develop critical thinking skills are needed. Greater integration between the lecture content and the students' own writing in small-group tutorials may also be helpful in guiding students towards a positive outcome in their writing experiences at university. A more detailed summary of this teaching intervention is contained in the article below.

Resource

Schultz, D. (2012) Impact of research, reading, and writing training on first-year undergraduate student performance in an introductory earth science course. *Unpublished*.

Encouraging GEES students to reflect on their social transition to university

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As part of a series of interactive workshops for a unit entitled 'Introducing Human Geographies', first-year students are expected to devise and conduct qualitative research techniques (such as focus groups and interviews) around the theme of 'studentification'. The students play alternate roles in workshops, for instance focus group moderator, interviewer and research participant. The ultimate aim of the assessment is for students to generate data that will help them *Describe and discuss the geography of student identity* for their unit assessment. Beyond providing basic training in qualitative research techniques, the assessment and associated workshops encourage students to reflect upon their transition to student life/higher education and exposes them to the perspectives of fellow students. Additionally, the exercises enhance students' spatial awareness of Manchester and the issues regarding inclusion and exclusion within student geographies (ie where they do and don't go, and why).

The 'Mantz Yorke' approach to induction

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We use a range of teaching and learning approaches in a co-ordinated manner to address six key requirements of stage one induction as set out by Mantz Yorke. These are the induction week, small-group tutorials, fieldwork, practical skills-orientated modules and a peer-assisted learning scheme. In so doing, our induction process addresses a range of pedagogical, skills-based and social issues facing stage one students, using a combination of measures embedded in the curriculum. It also treats stage one induction as an on-going process throughout the entire academic year.

Resource

See Appendix 3.

Interventions to support the transition through university

Supporting students' transitions from first to second year

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In 2010-12, we conducted a project to:

- understand the issues and needs of students making the transition from first to second year;
- explore students' usage of existing sources of support when making this transition;
- gather recommendations about how students could be supported as they make this transition;
- develop and monitor new forms of support, based on these recommendations.

The project involved:

- sending an online survey to all second-year students taking compulsory Human Geography modules at the University of Northampton, and all second-year students taking compulsory modules in a comparable social science subject at the University;
- drawing upon survey findings to develop a new package of induction, guidance and support resources, for use in activities with Human Geography students making the transition from first to second year;
- using a second online survey to evaluate the effectiveness of this intervention, by comparing the experiences of second-year students studying compulsory modules in Human Geography (to whom staff had delivered the new package of support) and the comparison subject (where there had been no change in support offered to students).

The project is innovative because:

- as Maunder *et al.* (2010) note, research and practice relating to transitions within higher education in the UK have often tended to be limited, despite a large body of research and guidance relating to transitions from school to higher education (Richardson 2005), or from higher education to work (Brooks 2007);
- the project is evidence-based and effectiveness has how been monitored, evidenced and enhanced over three academic years;
- an undergraduate peer researcher (Sonia Coates) contributed to all parts of the project.

Resource

Horton, J., Tucker, F. & Coates, S. (2013) Supporting undergraduates' transitions to year 2: banishing the 'second-year blues'. In Andrews, J., Clark, R., Thomas, L. & Aggarwal, R. (Eds) *Compendium of Effective Practice in Higher Education: volume 2*. Published by Aston University, Birmingham & HEA, York.

The personal and professional development (PPD) programme at Sheffield Hallam University

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The PPD programme is not assessed in the same way as other modules. Although compulsory, students do not receive any formal credits for completing the programme. It begins in the first year, when a PPD tutor is allocated to students in the first week of the semester. Each PPD tutor has only seven or eight PPD students per year and will stay with the same groups throughout their course. Tutors support students through a range of PPD activities and get to know them personally. PPD is designed to help students to:

- make the most of their learning experiences;
- be more successful on their course;
- achieve other goals they may have in the future (eg suitable employment);
- think about their academic, personal and professional development, and their career strategy.

It is based on these principles:

- to do well, students need to improve how they learn;
- reviewing and reflecting on how they do things helps students to learn;
- recording achievements helps when students come to apply for a job.

In the first year, the focus of PPD is on the transition into university. First-year students meet their PPD tutor at least eight times, in small-group tutorials. These tutorials appear on their timetable. Students also have one-to-one meetings with their tutor to discuss their academic progress at the beginning of each semester. These meetings will help students to reflect on their progress so far and to plan how to improve their performance in the future. The combination of group and individual meetings is designed to help students to:

- improve their self-awareness and to understand themselves better;
- reflect on feedback from other modules;
- improve their study, communication skills and subject knowledge;
- begin the cycle of recording, reviewing/reflecting and planning; identifying strengths and areas to improve, and then planning what to build on/address.

In the second and third year, the focus of PPD is on:

- developing students' academic skills, reviewing and reflecting on their progress so far, identifying strengths and areas to improve, and then planning how to address these;
- developing professional and employability skills and knowledge – including the skills related to choosing and finding a job (such as CV writing and interview skills) and the role of relevant professional bodies;
- enhancing students' research skills to enable them to complete the final-year dissertation.

In the third year, we focus on more professional skills, longer-term career management, postgraduate study, encouraging students to maintain their own professional networks and continuing professional development.

Peer mentoring for semi-independent overseas fieldwork

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The Foundation Degree in Development Geography (FDDG) at Bath Spa University offers an Overseas Development Experience module, involving a work placement for an extended period (of one to three months) in a developing country. It is a compulsory 20-credit module, taken during Year two of the foundation degree programme by six to ten students each year. The overseas placement is set up and supervised by a voluntary work specialist company, Projects Abroad (www.projects-abroad.co.uk). A wide variety of work placements are available: teaching, care and community including working as an assistant in an orphanage or building a school, conservation or journalism. Some placements are with affiliated NGOs, while others are posts in the workplace.

Students recount the apprehension naturally felt prior to taking an overseas placement, in particular the feeling of 'going into the unknown' both geographically (somewhere not visited before), academically (undertaking a project independently) and personally (coping with the challenges of living and working overseas, and doing so independently of family, friends and the university). The prospect of planning, preparing and doing an overseas placement in a developing country is both daunting and challenging. Although there are some excellent engaging and informative manuals in print, students will often find their message dry and remote from their own (often limited) experience. The opportunity for a peer-mentoring scheme grew out of the wealth of experiences gained by students returning after completion of their placements, including the valuable logistical and geographical knowledge they had accrued during their extended stay overseas. Students return with anecdotes of their experiences, both good and bad, fused with the adrenalin of wanderlust and the sense of self-achievement for having faced challenges in contrasting environments and societies. Coping with culture shock and some negative experiences is an integral part of the module and, with careful debriefing, these experiences can be harnessed for the benefit of the individual and others. Consequently, being exposed to accounts of real and personal experience by fellow students not only conveys practical advice but also, by a peer setting an example and recounting the fears and concerns that they felt, provides reassurance.

Overall, peer mentoring appears to be an appropriate mechanism for supporting students, particularly for vocational degrees. This pilot scheme suggests that it is an effective approach for providing additional support of a specialist nature, in this case preparing students mentally and logistically for an extended overseas placement. More details of this project and its wider applicability can be found at the resource below.

Resource

Simm, D. & Schaaf, R. (2011) Providing specialist support to peers: Evaluating a student mentoring scheme for semi-independent overseas fieldwork. *Planet*. **24**, pp.30-36.

Bridging the gap between foundation degrees and honours degrees

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Over the last decade, some UK geography departments have diversified their range of courses to offer foundation degrees, providing students with alternative routes through higher education (HE). These courses are delivered either offsite at further education colleges (FECs), embedded within an

undergraduate programme at higher education institutions (HEIs), or by work-based learning. These pathways present students, staff and institutions with new opportunities, issues and challenges. The needs and experiences of foundation degree students are varied, related to the individual's personal and academic background, the course pathway taken, institution-specific issues and the degree of support and preparedness for HE. The contrasting academic cultures, teaching methods and assessments encountered in FECs and HEIs, and the availability of resources, raise generic and specific issues, such as confidence building and learning to become independent and autonomous learners. The following recommendations are relevant not only to foundation degree courses but also have implications for other undergraduate courses in GEES subjects:

1. Firstly, stronger and closer collaboration between the HEI and the partner FEC is necessary, for instance through shared fieldwork. The key to effective transition to HE, particularly for direct entry students, is preparedness. For offsite students, familiarisation with the physical environment of the campus and experiencing the variety of learning environments are important. Regular interaction, rather than competition, with undergraduate students is beneficial, allowing foundation degree students to gauge their ability in comparison to undergraduates, socialise with peers and build up their confidence. Regular contact for staff and students could be facilitated by attending sample lectures or collaborative projects, fieldwork and social activities.
2. Secondly, alignment and reinforcement of the HE systems in FE, which includes training and active engagement with online and library resources resourced by the parent HEI, are recommended.
3. Thirdly, better alignment of academic and transferable skills is required, in particular greater exposure to research activities, critique and reflection, and independent and autonomous learning as preparation for year three of an honours degree.
4. Finally, managing the transition to HE by facilitating effective induction, subsequent support and social integration are important, particularly for direct entry students or those returning from placements. In addition, adapting the honours degree, without compromising academic standards, to include more vocational elements and alternative forms of assessment may be beneficial.

Foundation degrees continue to offer a valuable alternative to traditional undergraduate degrees, clearly satisfying the widening participation and employability remits of HE in the UK. Most significantly, the personal development, in terms of raising self-esteem and confidence, and 'value-added' academic progress made by foundation degree students should not be under-estimated, with many progressing to and successfully completing honours-level courses. More details of this project and its wider applicability can be found at the resource below.

Resource

Simm, D., Marvell, A., Schaaf, R. & Winlow, H. (2012) Foundation degrees in geography and tourism: a critical reflection on student experiences and the implications for undergraduate degree courses. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*. **36** (4), pp.563-583.

Interventions to support the transition out of university

Developing the professional practice of students

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The transition out of university into employment is often difficult, especially for students who have no previous experience of working in industry. University courses by their nature tend to prioritise the acquisition of academic knowledge rather than employability. Training in 'professional practice' is essential to enable students (a) to understand the role of geologists, civil engineers and environmental scientists in industry, and (b) to advance their skills in report writing, oral presentation, negotiation and business management.

A case study approach is arguably the best way to bridge the gap between scholarly activity and the workplace. Case studies based on 'real' industry projects in a 'virtual learning environment' can recreate the immediacy and complexity of working in industry, where frequently decisions are made based on incomplete evidence. By drafting work briefs, evaluating bids for drilling contracts and logging borehole cores recovered from site investigations, students directly experience issues such as quality assurance that are faced by professional geologists.

Since 2002, we have developed a Professional Practice module that is appropriate to the skills level of final-year undergraduates on our geology degree programmes. The ten-credit module involves students in the evaluation of a geotechnical and geochemical investigation of wastewater treatment by means of sub-surface dispersion within a chalk aquifer, based on a series of real investigations in Hampshire in the early 2000s. The module is run as an intensive six-day course, during a time when no other classes are held, in a manner similar to a residential field course (though we stay on campus). All assessment is completed within this period.

The Professional Practice module aims to provide the following learning outcomes:

- an awareness of the legislative and corporate forces that drive engineering and environmental geology investigations;
- knowledge of project management processes, particularly the design of work briefs and contracting;
- a sound knowledge of the procedures used in undertaking a geologically-orientated site investigation, including a drilling programme;
- an understanding of quality assurance and health and safety issues in industry;
- skills in preparing business-type reports and delivering oral presentations, which may be based on team investigations.

For several years, we also provided a similar module within a Master's degree programme. This was described in a 'Planet' article in 2005. At that stage, we planned to capture the content of the module in a multi-media learning resource and to make this widely available to the GEES community. That vision was not accomplished in part because trials of the computer media did not engage students in the same way as a 'live' performance, which has the essential components of immediacy and teamwork.

Students' responses are monitored annually and have generally been positive, indicating that the learning objectives had been met. When asked what they had gained from the module, students listed:

- improved skills in oral presentation;

- ability to work under pressure;
- working effectively as part of a team;
- learning new skills of negotiation and logistics (land ownership issues, etc);
- understanding the importance of legislation and company structures;
- a better understanding of how large site investigations are undertaken.

When asked what they regarded as the three best features of the module, students said:

- group work, spending time with classmates;
- oral presentations (other students listed this as one of the worst features!);
- the core logging exercise (this involved teamwork with a set time constraint);
- learning how professional practice interfaces with geology;
- feedback from the tutor on presentations and exercises (to help meet the learning objectives, students were given immediate feedback from tutors on their performance).

Resource

Moles, N., Mortimore, R. & Thrower, A. (2005) A learning resource to support Masters-level training of geologists in professional practice. *Planet*. **14**, pp.18-21.

Developing students' employability skills through participatory geographies

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Our example relates to the transition out of university, and relates to a second-year module entitled Participatory Geographies. This module is community-based with students working in small groups on local authority or community projects. In previous years, we have had students assisting with the development and analysis of a community council questionnaire, which subsequently informed the development of a community plan. More recently, we have had students working with the environmental arm of Rhondda Cynon Taff Council, to raise awareness of the Taff's Well Park Thermal Spring. This has involved the design and delivery of questionnaires, poster and promotional literature, as well as a launch event within the park.

This module is a powerful way of connecting geographical theory on participatory and community development with practical engagement. Student feedback has been very positive, with students recognising the challenges of sustaining community engagement, working within a professional arena that often demands a quick turn-around on work. It has also given them experience of communicating their work to different audiences that range from school children, council members, academics and local community groups.

We have quite a hands-off approach in this module. The emphasis is on the students designing, managing and problem solving of their own accord. The practical element is supplemented with fortnightly online learning tasks, which encourage the students to make the link between theory and practice.

It helps the transition to employment by beginning to get the students to think about how they interact with those outside academia and how their learning in the classrooms ties to their learning outside it, and it helps them to develop their emotional intelligence, which is something that is highly prized by employers. It

should be noted that this module is built upon in the final year through a similar student-led module focussed around student-authored fieldwork.

Supporting students' applications to PGCE programmes

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Following research conducted in the School of Education at Northumbria University, this ten-credit module addresses the shortage of geography graduates considering teaching as a career and the falling numbers of geography teachers available for employment. The module aims to provide third-year students with a solid grounding in the nature and purpose of geography education, together with practical experience to enable them to confidently make a decision about entry into the teaching profession. By the end of the module, students:

- have a clear understanding of the nature of contemporary geography education, including its scope and purpose (assessed via a written assignment justifying the inclusion of geography in the school curriculum);
- are able to implement different methods and skills in the teaching of geography (assessed in the presentation and written components);
- have developed their own skills and abilities for a teaching career (assessed via a presentation and written justification);
- have explicit evidence of personal development in key skills such as communication and IT skills (assessed in the presentation and written components).

Students follow a programme of lectures, tutorials and fieldwork that will address their needs as potential geography teachers. They also undertake practical teaching experience in both secondary and primary schools, developing a good profile to enhance their application to a PGCE course. Specific help is given via tutorials to those wishing to apply for a PGCE place, and students who have followed this module in the past have been very successful in obtaining places on PGCE courses.

Life during and beyond geomatics

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Geomatics – the surveying, mapping and geographic information sciences – is a relatively small undergraduate discipline in UK universities: a search of the UCAS website for 'land surveying' in April 2013 returned only three courses, and a search for 'geographic information' returned only 13 courses. Even then, some of the degrees listed are seemingly quite broad, eg BSc Geography, as opposed to being clearly focussed on geomatics science. At Newcastle University, there are two degree courses in geomatics: BSc Surveying and Mapping Science; and BSc Geographic Information Science. While these courses attract relatively small numbers of students (c.35 undergraduates across the courses each year) there are very strong links to industry.

Geomatics will be a 'new' subject to nearly all students joining the courses, because it is unlikely they will have undertaken any geomatics studies prior to coming. *Life During and Beyond Geomatics* is an annual event

at the start of each academic year that brings professional bodies, trade groups, commercial organisations and undergraduate students from the geomatics community together. The event aims to:

- help first-year students *transition IN* to their studies by seeing the breadth of professional practice and disciplines that relate to their degree. As well as developing confidence in talking to professionals, first-year students submit a written report about the event as part of a study skills module. The report is assessed and feedback offered to help the transition to an academic writing style and standard, in addition to hoping that it helps them to reflect upon and consolidate their experience;
- help students to prepare to *transition OUT* by promoting careers management, developing workplace understanding and enabling students to talk to practitioners about industry developments (e. new equipment and software), professional accreditation pathways, career/placement opportunities, interview/selection techniques and the nature of the world of work.

The event runs over a two-hour period and is based in the University’s Courtyard Restaurant. The restaurant furniture is cleared and the space taken over by up to 18 exhibition stands from companies, professional or trade groups, and equipment manufacturers. Where possible, alumni are encouraged to represent the organisations exhibiting. There is a core of exhibitors that attends each year:

- the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) and the Chartered Institution of Civil Engineering Surveyors (CICES) attend to collect new student membership applications. The Newcastle degrees are the only undergraduate geomatics degrees in the UK accredited by both institutions;
- Ordnance Survey is a brand/name that students recognise and associate with the sector;
- equipment manufacturers (eg Leica Geosystems, Trimble) showcase developments in technology.

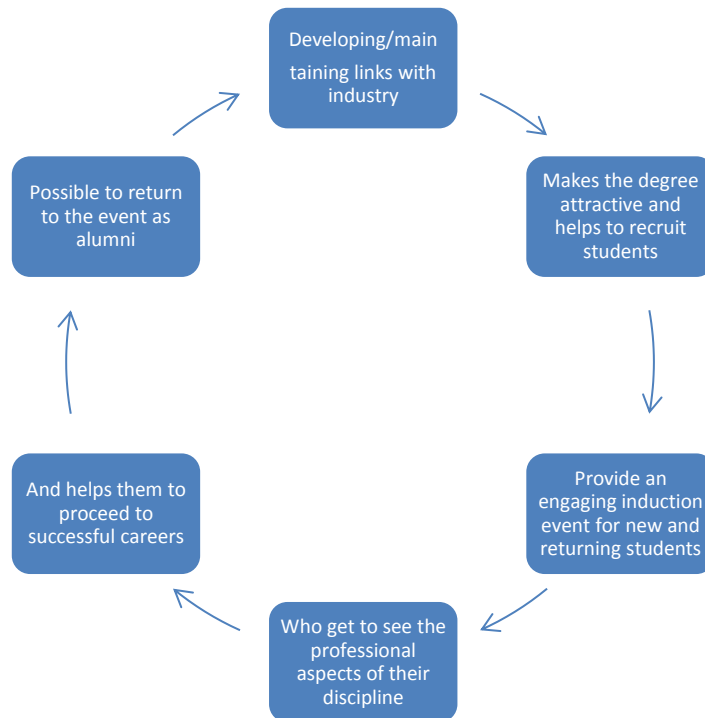
Additional exhibitors are invited to represent the different sectors of the geomatics industry. The following are examples of sectors and exhibitors from recent years, with an asterisk denoting representation by a geomatics alumnus:

Sector	Company
GIS and mapping products	ESRI; ProMap
Remote sensing and photogrammetry	Intergraph
Land and engineering surveying	Plowman Craven*; Scopus Engineering*; Loy Surveys*; eBIM
Civil engineering surveying	Costain*; Skanska*
Hydrographic and offshore surveying	Fugro; GEMS Survey; Schlumberger
Energy	BP*; Shell

With the event taking place at the start of the academic year (normally the second teaching week), the opening five minutes of the event is used to award prizes, the recipients of which were determined at the summer exam boards. Often, prize sponsors are in attendance as exhibitors so students are able to receive their prize from their sponsor directly. Following the prize giving, exhibitors are given 30 seconds each to introduce themselves using the public address system, and then it is an open floor for students to visit stands and chat to the exhibitors. It is run in a social setting – wine, soft drinks and a buffet are provided.

The event is not a recruitment fair *per se*. Companies can advertise and promote placement/job opportunities if they want but the primary role is to raise professional awareness in the students.

The innovative aspect of the event is the aim of, and its part in, realising a lifecycle approach to the students’ experience (Bramald *et al.* 2009). The event helps students join courses, re-engages them on their return each year and ultimately supports their exit trajectory into employment. Hopefully, the same students will then return to support the cycle again in their role as alumni.



'Figure 1: Lifecycle approach to the *Life During and Beyond Geomatics* event'. (Bramald *et al.* 2009)

While the event is well received by both students and the organisations that come in, there is an on-going review of what else the event could include. Currently, we are investigating:

1. Growing the number of exhibitors at the event by allowing several organisations from a single sector to exhibit:
 - increasing the size of the event may generate even more of a professional, tradeshow-like atmosphere;
 - it would remove the need for the organisers to select and manage which companies can attend in which years, allowing any company to attend who wanted to;
 - there is concern from the organisers that this would create more of a recruitment-fair feel, which is not the aim of the event;
 - the students consulted about the idea have expressed concern that too many companies may make it difficult to get around in the allotted time. Increasing the time would require timetabling and more input from the exhibitors.
2. Adding in a seminar programme to the event:
 - to showcase career and professional pathways, the organisers are considering adding in a seminar programme to run alongside the exhibition. This would allow different sectors to offer 'day in the life of ...' talks that would describe different careers or showcase developments in the sector;
 - we would need to think about how to ensure adequate attendance in both the seminars and exhibition simultaneously.
3. Using student buddies from second or third year to facilitate introductions of first-year students to industry guests.
4. Include postgraduate research pathways in the Geomatics sector.

Resources

Bramald, T., Mills, H., Mills, J. & Edwards, S. (2009) Recruitment, retention and progression of Geomatics undergraduates at Newcastle University. *Austrian Journal for Surveying and Geoinformation*. **97** (1).

There is a YouTube video based on the event here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uf_nvl_F_xo

Appendix I

Student transitions from school to university within GEES disciplines workshop, Newcastle University, 25 January 2013

Each table provides a summary of group discussions on the social and academic issues in transitions to, through and from university.

Academic transitions

In	Through	Out
Trying to understand the rules, eg word counts, referencing 'I can never get more than 72%'. Referencing. Can't just keep re-sitting. Self confidence. Need to take responsibility.	2(1) pressure. Start to evaluate the quality of their own work. Find your academic voice. Become a partner in learning. Original thinking. Coming back from long vacation. Strategic student. Becoming a researcher (still looking ...). Exchange programmes and time out of study.	2(1) pressure. Careers support. Reflection on skills developed as a graduate attitude. Looking like and acting like a professional.
Hearing that there is no right answer (and being okay with this). Learning new skills (continuously). Project work (autonomous learning).		

In	Through	Out
Critical thinking. Multiple sources. Beyond Wikipedia problem. Internet reliance. Questionable reference creativity at school? More flexible system. Maturity 'need to know to ask'.	Re-sit question? Refresher courses. Optional modules: - too little choices; - more insider knowledge. Learning pathways. Placement years.	Disconnect from uni: - databases; - journal, etc; - cost of all of this ... Knowledge transfer. Unemployed alumni. "12 months to make it."
Referencing. Gap years/returners. Summer schools will help – too soft in approach?		

In	Through	Out
'Spoon fed'. Learning. Assessment – tutor. Guidance - introduce. Knowledge - narrow. Expertise - tutor. Skills – taught.	Progressive. Developing. Peer support. Broadening. Academics. Practice.	Self-responsibility. Practice applying. Self. Dialogue. Focused. Self. Apply.

Lack of ability to critically assess.
 Inter-disciplinary learning could overcome this.
 Research skills.

Social transitions

In	Through	Out
Making new friends. Finding your place in a larger group. Asking questions in a big group. Moving home. Cooking, washing and life skills. Time management. Creating a routine. Having no-one to look over their shoulder. Relationships – making and breaking. Self-evaluation in a group. No longer being the higher achiever.	Missing a year/changing cohort. Changing friendships. Moving accommodation.	Moving ... again. Job panic. Moving away from uni. Loss of friends and security.
Family crisis (ANY TIME).		

In	Through	Out
New people. Environment. First in family	Halls of residence. Changing relationships. Changing individuals. Expectations – academic and employer. Placement years.	Perspectives of time. Culture shock. Competition. Gender balance. Social skills.
Regional accent/language barrier. Finance and other commitments. Student culture. Experience (drinking, peer pressure, campus relations). Social impacting academic much more than the other way round. Respectable 'academic citizenship' to overcome (Millington 2013).		

In	Through	Out
Making friends. Leaving friends. Financial security. Emotional security. Natural environment.	Keeping friends. Changing friends. Financial flux. Emotional uncertainty. Exploring environment.	Losing friends. Debt. Self confidence. Creating own future.

Appendix 2

Using first-year undergraduate tutorials to embed a new educational culture

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Tutorial module (GE0152): portfolio assignment 1

Read through the two short student essays provided and undertake the following:

- (a) Prepare a brief, structured critique for each essay.
- (b) Briefly compare the two essays and attempt to assign a mark for each using the marking guidelines supplied.

Maximum two sides A4.

Tutorial module (GE0152): portfolio assignment 2

Final-year dissertation presentations will take place on Thursday 17 and Friday 18 November 2011. You are expected to attend two sessions of your choice from the circulated programme. Each session will contain three or four presentations.

Prepare a brief critical overview of the presentations, commenting on both content and delivery. Presenters should have a clear research question(s), aim(s) or objective(s). They should also provide a geographical/environmental context to their project in terms of literature review and study area. In addition, they should have a well-justified rationale for their study design and methodology. Do not expect all presenters to have a lot of results to talk about – this will depend on the nature and timing of their project. Some will present results and others may not. To what extent is the presentation well-structured and delivered? Is it well supported with appropriate visual aids and is the student able to answer effectively any questions from the audience at the end?

Maximum two sides A4.

Tutorial module (GE0152): portfolio assignment 3

The aim of this exercise is to encourage you to become familiar with the way research articles/papers are written in specialist journals/periodicals. You will see that they are written in a very different format from that of an essay, often with a clearly defined, sometimes report style, structure. Articles normally start with an abstract, which provides a brief summary of the article. It summarises the aims, context, methods, key findings and wider significance of the research. The introduction reviews the literature on the subject, outlines the wider significance and contribution of the research and specifies the research aims. There may then be a section presenting the study area context, followed by a section on the rationale for the site selection, sampling design and analysis (methodology). The results section then presents the data and describes the salient features of it such as patterns and trends. The discussion section then focuses on the interpretation and explanation of the results, placing these within the context of published literature in order to substantiate the key findings. The concluding section then provides a summary of the key findings, usually linking these back to the original aims. Finally, a bibliography is presented.

Choose one of the two papers provided and answer the following questions.

- (1) What are the key aims of the paper?
- (2) What are the main elements of the research methodology?
- (3) What are the key findings of the research and how does the author explain these? Include examples of how these findings are supported by previously published literature.
- (4) What arguments does the author use to justify the research (think novelty, originality, wider significance, applications...)?

Maximum two sides A4.

Tutorial module (GE0152): portfolio assignment 4

Key skills in Geography and Environment: evaluation and progress

This list of skills is drawn from the Quality Assurance Agency Subject Benchmark statements for Geography and ES3 (Earth Sciences, Environmental Sciences and Environmental Studies). Please look at each of the skills and indicate (a) your perceived level of competence (1 = very competent, 2 = competent, 3 = satisfactory, 4 = weak, 5 = very weak), and (b) supporting evidence including, for example, modules where these skills were fostered and specific exercises, activities or assignments; you might also consider evidence from assignment feedback sheets. Please bring the completed form to your next guidance tutorial meeting.

Intellectual skills	Perceived competence (1 – 5)	Supporting evidence
Recognising, using and assessing the merits of subject-specific theories, paradigms, concepts and principles.		
Effective analysis and problem solving.		
Effective decision making.		
Critically judging and evaluating evidence.		
Critically interpreting data and text.		
Abstracting and synthesising information.		

Developing reasoned argument.		
Taking responsibility for own learning and developing habits of reflection upon that learning.		

Discipline-specific/practical skills	Perceived competence (1 – 5)	Supporting evidence
Planning, designing and executing a piece of research or enquiry, including production of a final report.		
Collecting, recording and analysing data using appropriate techniques in the field (with due regard for safety and risk assessment).		
Collecting, recording and analysing data using appropriate techniques in the laboratory (with due regard for safety and risk assessment).		
Preparing effective maps and diagrams using a range of appropriate technologies.		
Employing a variety of social survey and interpretative methods for collection, analysis and understanding of information from the human world.		
Employing a variety of technical and laboratory-based methods for collection and analysis of spatial and environmental information (eg GIS, remote sensing and mathematical modelling).		
Combining and interpreting		

different types of geographical evidence (eg texts, imagery, maps, digitised and laboratory data).		
Recognising the moral and ethical issues involved in debates and enquiries.		

Key skills	Perceived competence (1 – 5)	Supporting evidence
Effective use of a variety of forms of written communication, including essays and reports.		
Fully acknowledge sources by referencing work in an appropriate manner.		
Effective verbal presentation techniques including use of appropriate audio-visual aids.		
Appreciate issues of sample collection, accuracy, precision and uncertainty during collection, recording and analysis of data.		
Solve numerical problems using computer and non-computer based techniques.		
Effective use of information technology (including spreadsheets, databases, word processing and statistical packages, email and www).		
Information handling and retrieval (including use of online computer searches); identifying, retrieving, sorting and exchanging information; investigating a wide range of sources.		
Interpersonal situations including		

working with groups/teams, and recognising and respecting the viewpoints of others.		
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Personal attributes and social skills	Perceived competence (1 – 5)	Supporting evidence
Develop the skills necessary for self-managed and lifelong learning (eg working independently, time management, organisational skills and self-motivation).		
Ability to work autonomously and with others.		
Ability to work creatively, demonstrating initiative and imagination.		
Identify and work towards targets for personal, academic and career development.		
Develop an adaptable and flexible approach to study and work.		

Tutorial portfolio exercise: geo-hazards

Choose one case study of a geo-hazard which could be an example of: volcanic eruption, earthquake, tsunami, landslide or a major climatic event such as a hurricane or flood.

Prepare a handout (maximum two sides A4, 12 point font, including relevant images/diagrams) summarising the following:

- nature of the event;
- causal factors;
- effects/impacts;
- approaches to mitigation;
- reading list.

Submit your handout to me so that I can copy for circulation at the tutorial.

Be prepared to deliver a brief presentation (5 mins) and to discuss your case study with the rest of the group.

This exercise will form part of the portfolio component of assessment on the Tutorial Module (GE0152) and will contribute 10% of the overall module assessment weighting.

Module code: GE0152

Module title: TUTORIAL MODULE

Assignment: ESSAYS, titles set by tutor.

Essay 3 Titles – choose ONE of the following:

1. Discuss the various sources and processes of sediment input to glacier systems.
2. To what extent is human activity a 'disturbing factor' in affecting global erosion and sediment yield?
3. Discuss the factors affecting the size and shape of the river hydrograph.

Submission date: Tutorial 10, Thursday 7 March 2013, 10:00-11:00.

The **aims** of this assignment are:

- to familiarise and equip you with the skills necessary to write essays at degree level;
- to prepare you to undertake successfully essay-based assignments/examinations in other modules;
- to enable you to explore more fully specific areas of the first-year (level 4) curriculum and develop your knowledge of the subject you are studying for your degree.

A good answer will exhibit the following characteristics:

- your essay will be appropriately structured, with a clear introduction and conclusion;
- material used in your answer will be well organised and used to answer the question directly; there will be no irrelevant information;
- you will demonstrate a detailed knowledge of the topic, making use of appropriate literature and demonstrating evidence of relevant wide reading;
- all references used to write the essay will be cited and included in a bibliography at the end of the essay and written according to the Harvard convention;
- your written style will be clear, lucid and succinct; there will be no unnecessary use of words and no use of colloquialisms or personal pronouns;
- presentation will be of high quality, avoiding typographic, spelling and grammatical errors;
- diagrams and summary tables will be used where appropriate.

Indicative word limit where appropriate: 2000 words* (note that students who exceed this word limit will be penalised).

*Excludes bibliography, figure captions and tables. You should include a word count at the end of the essay.

Appendix 3

The Mantz Yorke approach to induction

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Stage one induction strategy

The induction strategy for BSc Environmental Science incorporates the six key elements necessary for stage one induction identified by Mantz Yorke, and shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Key elements of induction and components of the curriculum

Element	Induction week	Tutorials	Fieldwork	Techniques modules	PALS
Learning how to learn.	√	√		√	√
Acknowledge students as individuals	√	√	√		√
Learning through as well as about the subject		√	√	√	√
Teaching for engagement.		√	√	√	
Group-based study.		√	√	√	
Assessment and feedback.		√	√		√

The curriculum components are described below:

Induction week

A mixture of sessions outlining key information on the BSc Environmental Science programme, university administration and examples of environmental research. First meeting of the tutorial group (approximately ten students) with an 'icebreaker' session, informal field trip to Plymouth Sound, welcome party and diving information.

Tutorials

Series of ten small-group teaching sessions staffed by the personal tutor and spread throughout the academic year. Incorporate a sequence of five assessments, each of which carries relatively modest marks and is intended to provide rapid feedback to allow students to gauge the standard required. Feedback from these assessments provides useful feed-forward for larger assessments which test similar skills later in the programme.

Fieldwork

Used throughout stage one to develop field skills, provide direct experience of concepts delivered in lectures, provide group work and team-building and social opportunities. A one-day field trip to the Eden Project with the personal tutors is used as an 'icebreaker' on the first day of term one. A three-day residential field course is run in the fifth week of term one at the Slapton Field Centre in Devon – this

comprises one day of ecology, one day of geology and one of outdoor activities including canoeing on the River Dart. Several other sessions in the Techniques modules feature fieldwork (see next section).

Techniques modules

Two modules worth 20-credits each to develop practical skills in field and laboratory methods. Term one features a series of field and laboratory days, which cover a range of disciplines, while term two introduces students to research, who undertake practical projects in small groups. In the latter case, students are introduced to the principles of project management, specifically group working, planning, reporting and review. Student groups are changed from term one to term two to facilitate greater mixing of the cohort.

PALS

The Peer Assisted Learning Scheme (PALS) allows groups of stage one students to meet with stage two students (PALS leaders) from the BSc Environmental Science programme in order to improve their learning. The stage two students are selected by staff and undergo training prior to the sessions. Sessions tend to focus on assessments and PALS leaders understand that their role is to facilitate learning and not to simply provide answers. Sessions start in week two of term one and continue on a fortnightly basis throughout stage one.

Dr John Maskall
Stage 1 Tutor
BSc Environmental Science
SoGEES
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Further reading

This is not intended to be a fully comprehensive reading list. Instead it is intended to serve only as a starting point for those looking to access further information about the transition to, through and out of university.

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