Introduction
Students with non-traditional entry qualifications are making up a greater proportion of university students than ever before. Building on existing quantitative and qualitative work, the Improving Transition Project looked at whether the differences in performance between BTEC and A-level students is due to the difference in teaching and assessment methods, or the BTEC syllabi not leading so clearly onto our Level 1 programmes.

The Strategic Excellence Initiative has given us the opportunity to pilot and evaluate new interventions to support an enabling culture where our students can excel, regardless of their entry route to Brunel. In order to implement more substantial interventions to improve the outcomes of our students, we are continuing to fund this valuable project.

Project Objectives
Our Improving Transition Project had the following objectives that we set out to achieve:

- “Map and gap” syllabi and teaching and assessment methods of the BTEC
- Recruit staff and student Champions
- Develop department action plans
- Pilot and evaluate initiatives aimed at improving transition
- Develop web-based resources and good practice guides

Outputs and Implementations
Our partnership with Pearson has been instrumental in developing our understanding of the BTEC by providing us with information about the syllabi and the ongoing changes to the qualification. To “map and gap” the BTEC syllabi, teaching practices and assessment methods against our Level 1 programme, we held a number of Education Exchanges with Uxbridge College and a selection of academic staff from Brunel. The sessions provided an opportunity for Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) staff from adjoining disciplines to exchange information on programme structure and the challenges that students face in transitioning to HE. This has enabled us to identify where students may have knowledge or skills gaps in particular subjects.

Staff Champions were recruited in all of the departments this project engaged with, who have been instrumental in raising awareness of the project in academic departments and collaborating on action plans and interventions. It was decided that the most efficient means of engaging students with the Improving Transition Project was to gather their feedback in Student Staff Liaison Committees; this provided a wide range of students to collect feedback from who were in different levels of study.
Staff and students have been instrumental in developing action plans and piloting initiatives. These have included Education Exchanges for FE and HE staff, Preparing for Exams sessions for Level 1 students, and introducing Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL) into new departments. We will continue to develop and trial new, larger-scale initiatives as the project continues.

We have created a number of good practice guides to highlight what we have implemented to support transition. These include support for practitioners, support for students, and a guide to the personal tutoring toolkit that was developed as part of the Improving Transition Project; the resources that make up this toolkit are also available to the sector.

Outcomes
Our planned objectives have been achieved, but have highlighted the need for more work in this area. It is still not entirely clear why students in some departments transition relatively successfully regardless of their entry qualification, but in others these groups of learners are quite obviously distinguishable from their peers in terms of their attainment and likelihood to continue their studies. As such we believe there is scope to do further research into other areas, such as student engagement and motivation, alongside introducing larger scale interventions in the future.

Likely Longer Term Impact
Improving the quality of learning opportunities for all our students remains a priority for Brunel, and as such the Improving Transition Project will continue to be funded until November 2018. This will allow us to work with more academic departments, pilot and implement more substantial interventions, and to develop a greater understanding of the challenges students face in transitioning to HE. In the long term we expect to see an improvement in the attainment, retention, and satisfaction of our students, which we see as a valuable investment as the academic diversity of our student body continues to grow.

Summary
The HEA Strategic Excellence Initiative has allowed us to take forward our work on exploring the challenges that students face when joining the University with non-traditional entry qualifications. It has been vital in expanding existing projects at the University, such as PAL, and in building links between academic departments and the Academic Skills Service. We have also been able to collaborate with Uxbridge College on a range of workshops and Education Exchanges in order to develop our understanding of the academic experiences of BTEC students.

Further Information
If you would like to find out more about the Transition Project at Brunel, please contact:

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