‘Me, myself and I’: Locating student transitions, experiences and outcomes of BAME and other widening participation students within an experience-based programme

Stephane Farenga

@StepFareEdu
1. Policy context

   a) Need for direct support → maximise academic & social outcomes
   b) What is transition?

3. Focus on 2015/16
   a) Key outcomes
   b) BAME focus
   c) Unpack transitions of students
Policy re-framing

- 2004 HE Act
- 2011 White Paper “Students at the heart…”
- Shift towards student lifecycle
- White Paper endorses further success measures

Research evidence

- Ineffectiveness of bursaries on entrant’s decisions (Callender et al., 2009; Callender and Wilkinson, 2013)
- ‘Deadweight loss’ (Callender and Wilkinson, 2013)
Context
National WP policy: National Scholarship Programme

Designed as an access tool

Evolved into a success & retention tool

University of Hertfordshire
Methodology

- Case study approach (Yin, 2009 and Stake, 1995)
- Mix of online surveys and qualitative case studies
- Generalisability and transferability

- 2013/14: 162 responses (Year 1 only)
- 2014/15: 432 responses
- 2015/16: 315 responses
2013/14
Opt-in peer mentoring

28% benefitted from mentoring
45% sought other forms of support
22% attributed peer mentoring to persistence

Farenga, 2015

Maximising academic & social outcomes?
Guidance

“I needed guidance to help me in the right direction and to clarify my thoughts and ideas.”

Skills

“The first session we had helped me a great deal in terms of structuring an assignment I had at the time.”
Focus groups at end of 2013/14
Choice of support and self-selective engagement
Transition as... Induction
- Pathway following sequentially defined periods
- High level of institutional control

Transition as... Development
- Personal trajectory “shifting from one identity to another”
- Non-linear
- Think Terenzini et al (1996)
University of Hertfordshire 2014/15

• Herts Success
  – Academic/Social/Employability
  – Experience-based
Overview

Herts Success 2014/15

- Exam preparation workshop
- Public speaking training
- Personal effectiveness
- Interview clothing vouchers
- Language evening classes
- Adventure weekend
- Camp America
- Winter Wonderland trip
- How to get a 1st
- TEFL
- Work experience bursaries
- Welcome / Induction
- First Aid
- G200 & PIMUN conferences
- Cookery classes
- Improve your referencing skills
- Academic writing
- Thorpe Park
- International language experience
- 1400+ student participants
- 11,500+ hours delivered
- 58 events delivered
Findings
Success

"Herts Success has played a big role in my first year, as I have been able to attend various events, academic and social. Through such events I have gained skills and have widened my experience."

– Male, Engineering

Farenga, 2016

88%
Who engaged got a 2:1 or a 1st
Findings
Retention

2013/14
13.85% withdrew

2014/15
8% withdrew

42% decrease

"I was growing disillusioned with my mediocre work output. But the various [events] and short courses offered by Herts Success made me realise that opportunities could be found if I worked hard enough. I have stayed because Herts Success has showed me that I can build skills even when I may feel I lack them.” – Male, History

Farenga, 2016
“It's been nice knowing there was always help whenever I needed it, I haven't needed it but all the same. Knowing there is some help waiting is always reassuring.” – 3rd year male, Automotive Engineering

Farenga, 2016
• Herts Success
  – Remove traditional labels
  – Experience-based
  – Extending opportunities, building peer networks and removing barriers
• This year’s research
• Deeper look at transition & potential categorisation
• Stronger emphasis on engagement
• Still observing success outcomes
• BAME differentials?
Findings
Student demographics – 2015/16

- 53% BAME from backgrounds
- 29% engagement
- 32% of Y1s commute
- 62.5% have additional commitments
- 57% are first in family to attend uni
- 65% live on-campus
Findings
Difficulties in transition?

37% Y1s considered withdrawing:
Findings
Difficulties in transition?

"Herts success helped me fit in much quicker and easier by organising little events and trips at the start of the year, when no one knew anyone, this helped me personally by allowing likeminded people and others in the same boat to meet and get to know each other." – 1st Year female, Motorsport Technology

“Herts success provided a lot of free extra-curricular activities and events that really helped me to cope with academic stress. Herts success has also provided helpful trainings and workshops which really benefited my academic skills (academic mentor)" – 2nd Year male, BAME, Pharmacy

Opportunities
Findings

Overall impact

- Overall positive impact amongst engaged Y1s: 90%
- Overall positive impact amongst engaged Y2/3/4s: 88%
Findings
Benefits of engagement?

“It has motivated me to keep going and work hard to achieve my goal. Putting in extra effort into my work and other areas of life. It has helped me grow as an individual and a young adult.”
– 1st Year female, BAME, Law

“Herts success provided financial support for me by providing clothing vouchers for me to smarten up when I got a job interview. Herts success also provided me with financial support when I completed numerous unpaid work placements last summer.”
– 2nd Year male, BAME, Pharmacy

“Just being presented with the opportunities is enough to make me feel included.”
– Male, Engineering & Technology
## Findings

**BAME focus**

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<thead>
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<th>Year 1s engaged</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>BAME</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive impact on academic success</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>60%</td>
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<td>Positive impact on social integration</td>
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## Findings

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Transition narratives
Resiliency

“Having a mentor which had previously experienced my course and who has experienced a lot of what the University has to offer definitely helped academically and fitting in at University.” – Male, Engineering & Technology

“I felt really down for ages, but then got the email saying I was accepted on the Germany trip which made me feel better, that I had something good to look forward to.” – Female, White, Year 3, Philosophy and Creative Writing

“I was extremely anxious when I started, but when I began to attend events, I was able to meet people who helped me not only in the event, but also to settle into the university and become more comfortable with my surroundings.” – Female, Year 1, White, Humanities

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Transition narratives
Personal growth

“By providing interesting events and social activities that helped me to relieve stress and therefore concentrate better in my academic studies.” Male, BAME, Year 2, Pharmacy

“Herts Success provides a strong support system for me as a student and I am very grateful for it.” Female, BAME, Year 2, Photography

“Having more confidence and knowing that they're there to help whenever support is needed.” Female, White, Year 1, Business

“It's nice that it's there when I need it. Really motivates me and is an amazing bonus.” Female, White, Year 4, Event Management & Marketing

“Knowing that if I need help, whether socially, academically or mentally that Herts Success will help, and for that I’m grateful!” Male, BAME, Year 2, Mechanical Engineering
Conclusions

• Straddling institutional structure – sits within it – complementary - but students access on their own terms, self-selective, no pathways - encourages personal development

• Me, myself and I

• Resiliency narratives in quotes…Do we rely on students ‘putting hand up for support’
References


