A lifecycle approach to students in transition in Scottish higher education

A review of research, policy and practice

Yvonne Wayne, Robert Ingram, Karen MacFarlane, Nicola Andrew, Lesley McAleavy and Ruth Whittaker
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1. Executive summary

'A lifecycle approach to students in transition in Scottish higher education: A review of research, policy and practice' explores definitions and interpretations of transition in literature and policy and the impact on sector and institutional practice. This review provides an overview and establishes a baseline understanding of the critical factors, academic practice development and theoretical considerations inherent within the emerging pedagogy of transitions. A student lifecycle approach; in, through and out of university underpins the review, and guides the structure of the narrative.

Transition in the literature, policy and practice is largely interpreted through the lens of pre-entry, induction and the first year experience (FYE). The FYE is a cornerstone and key focus of transition research. Collectively findings of FYE research have made a significant contribution to the emergence of a more contemporary pedagogy that takes account of transition: in, through and now, out of university. The Scottish context is central to the review and is reflected in both the narrative and the case studies threaded throughout the review. These studies highlight good practice and innovation in transition activity both within the mainstream curriculum and the broader academic sphere.

The review follows the stages of the student transition lifecycle: in, through and out. The first part focuses on definitions of transition and transition into university, linked to the FYE. The FYE is the area that most is known about, with research and practice development findings frequently reported in UK literature and policy. In Scotland, transition and the FYE has largely been interpreted through the lens of articulation, pre-entry and induction, usually linked to the movement into university of the most disadvantaged students: represented in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD).

The second part of the review explores transition through university. Building on key findings of the FYE, this section focuses on the development of confidence, engagement and belonging as students transit through the academic sphere. The journey through university moves the interpretation of transition on from the original theories and practices highlighted by the FYE research to look at inclusive interventions that apply to the student body as a whole and not only to targeted groups.

The final section details transition 'out' of university, exploring 'graduateness' as an emerging theme linked to the integration of attributes developed as part of the mainstream curriculum. Compared to the work on the FYE (in) and on the development of engagement and belonging (through), moving out of university is the least researched transition mode. Transition out of university moves the discourse beyond the academic sphere and into the professional sphere. This mode supports students to move from a student identity to a professional one, enabling successful transition out of university and into the workplace.

The review concludes with recommendations for future development in identified areas of transition pedagogy, research and practice. To contextualise and highlight areas of transition practice in Scotland, the United Kingdom (UK) and internationally, a repository of exemplar case studies are attached as an appendix to the literature review.
Recommendations

➤ Expand the definition of curriculum to encompass all stages of transition; in, through and out; integrate extra and co-curricular spheres, promote a focus on student engagement and develop pedagogy and strategy around transitional identity and graduate attributes within the mainstream curriculum and broader academic sphere.

➤ In Scotland, in light of the SIMD review, reflect on the current emphasis on geographical location and consider aspects beyond physical and situational definitions of deprivation and poverty.

➤ Support the implementation of longitudinal transition activities that are inclusive and therefore more likely to be meaningful and useful to all students. These should include consideration, expansion and integration of learning communities, communities of practice, partnerships between academic and professional services staff; staff and students and students and employers.

➤ A key message for the sector emerging from literature, policy and practice is the importance of moving beyond pre-entry and the FYE to embed transition activity within a longitudinal student lifecycle model.

➤ Policy makers and academics should take cognisance of existing good practice and collectively work towards a scaled up approach to sector and institutional transition practice development.

➤ Linked to the above, the sector in Scotland should undertake a detailed review of transition practice to uncover barriers, validate current effective methodologies and implement scaled up national level pilot projects focused on innovative practice at all stages of transition. In particular consider the commissioning of work on the currently underrepresented area of transition out of university.

➤ Subject-specific transition features in the literature mainly as small-scale, activity based projects and studies. Consider a review of cross sector discipline based transition activities and implement scaled up pilot projects contextualised to a discipline based student life cycle.

Overall the review highlights an ongoing opportunity to explore and reflect on the definition of curriculum and the interpretation of transition within the academic sphere. There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that student engagement is most effective when linked to, and integrated with, the curriculum. Examples of this are abound in the literature but tend to be small scale practice development studies, and therefore are lacking in transferability and are challenging to mainstream. There is scope within the sector in Scotland to scale up some of the best examples of this work and sponsor national level projects, with a view to sustainably embedding the 'best of the best' into sector and institutional culture, policy and practice.
2. Introduction

The Higher Education Academy (HEA) in Scotland works in partnership with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to inform both strategy and practice in learning and teaching. This review is part of the HEA Scotland’s 2014-15 programmes of activities to support student transitions. ‘Students in Transition. A Lifecycle Approach in Scottish Higher Education: A Review of Research, Policy and Practice’ establishes a baseline understanding of influencing factors and theoretical considerations that inform the emerging pedagogy of transitions. The purpose of this review is to assist institutions in the development of transition practice within the academic sphere, citing examples of good practice, and highlighting areas for further research and development.

The review reflects on the concept of transition in higher education and transition definitions and interpretations at sector and institutional level. Multiple interpretations exist in the literature but there is no accepted and agreed definition. Gale and Parke (2012) offer a broad interpretation of transition as; ‘the capability to navigate change’ (737). Briggs et al (2012) argue that transition is a more complex process linked to longitudinal identity change and intellectual development. The transition approach however that predominates in the literature is that of pre-entry and adaptation to the first year on campus. This review moves the debate forward and reflects on a lifecycle approach that extends from pre-entry and induction through first year, moving into, through and out of university.

The review explores the major transition modes of in, through and out, through the lens of the FYE, broader concepts of engagement, confidence and belonging and the development of graduateness and professional identity. In order to address the Scottish context the review discusses articulation, a significant aspect of the Scottish higher education landscape and the FYE. The review generally encompasses a broad examination of transition policy and practice and allied to this, highlights examples of good practice and relevant case studies within the narrative and as an appendix to the main review.

Aims and objectives

The scope of the review is to establish a baseline understanding of the factors and theoretical considerations affecting transition, primarily focussed on how the sector defines transition and the impact (or lack of) on institutional practice. The review also reflects on the transition from both school and college within the context of the broader transition lifecycle from pre-entry to graduation and beyond. In addition to a discussion around generic and subject-specific issues and practices the review encompasses an exploration of student engagement and its relationship with successful transition. Crucially, the authors have identified critical success factors as well as areas for further development.

Overall the review contributes new knowledge to a comprehensive body of work undertaken by the HEA in the UK and in Scotland and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Enhancement Theme of Transition. The review is underpinned by national and international literature, integrating illustrative case study exemplars at key points throughout. All literature and aligned case studies were considered in the light of their applicability to both the UK and the Scottish context, which is timely as the Scottish Government has established a national Commission on Widening Access.

The objectives of the project were to:

- Explore and analyse the various aspects of academic practice affecting student transitions.
- Undertake a literature review of published or current research into the pedagogical and/or theoretical discourse relating to student academic transitions into and through HE.
- Provide an overview, analysis and reference list of published pedagogical case studies that support aspects of successful student transitions.
- Analyse underdeveloped areas of pedagogical knowledge affecting successful transitions.
- Explore any subject or discipline cluster specific considerations.
- Identify any specific considerations arising in relation to the Scottish HE context and make recommendations as appropriate at a strategic and operational level.
**Literature Review Methodology**

The review consisted of desk-based research in the form of a literature review and the scoping of publicly available, peer-reviewed and grey literature.\(^1\) Appropriate databases and digital repositories were accessed to support the development of the work. These included Emerald, Google Scholar and the Enhancement Themes website. The main search terms used were: articulation; belonging; curriculum; curricular pedagogy; co-curriculum; discipline-based/specific; engagement; employability; first year experience; higher education engagement; higher education policy; induction; lifelong learning; partnerships; pedagogy; transition; transition pedagogy; student engagement; student experience; student retention; widening participation.

In order to ensure that the review is both timely and relevant, a wide range of articles and case studies were sourced from the literature. Inclusion is limited to work published after 2000 with the exception of reference to seminal texts in the fields of transition and student engagement. The review includes both national and international material; the Scottish context however has remained the focus of the project. Specifically, the review explores the definitions of transitions; transitions into and through HE; discipline-specific transition issues and practices and the use of innovative approaches to student engagement. In addition, an exploration of the relationship between engagement and successful transitions into and through HEIs is included.

This review highlights current theory and practice and reveals areas of underdeveloped knowledge and understanding. Finally, the review provides (as an appendix) a curated repository of published pedagogical case studies.

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\(^1\) Although the EnTICE Project at the University of Strathclyde was identified through a keyword search the project aims and objectives had not been published. However, due to relevance of EnTICE to this project, contact was made with the project team who provided further information for inclusion in this report.
Structure of the Review

The review is structured into five main sections, reflecting the student lifecycle. Each section in the review highlights a number of exemplar case studies which provide examples of positive transition practice. In addition to these, a curated repository of case studies is provided as an appendix. This repository contains expanded details of all the case studies discussed and offers a number of additional examples of good practice.

Section One: Definitions of Transition.

This section explores how the concept of transition has been defined in the literature. In particular the review of definitions of transition examines the link between transition and widening participation and how this has impacted on pre-entry and articulation practice, particularly in Scotland.

Section Two: Transition into University.

This is the mode most commonly associated with transition. Transition into university dominates the research agenda and findings are frequently commented on and explored in literature, policy and practice. This section seeks to understand how FYE research has impacted on practice development in transition, particularly related to investigation into and exploration of the FYE, highlighting the impact of the third generation transition pedagogy developed by Kift et al (2010).

Section Three: Transition through University.

This section examines the dimensions of transition pedagogy, exploring and highlighting the multiple interpretations emerging from the FYE research. This section looks at the development of a longitudinal approach to transition through university, specifically the development of an inclusive ‘all student’ approach that embeds and mainstreams activity within the curriculum and academic sphere. Transition through university builds on the key findings of the FYE research and explores the broader areas of confidence, engagement and belonging.

Section Four: Transition out of University.

This section addresses transition out of university and reflects on professional identity and the increasing integration of employability and graduate attributes into the mainstream curriculum. This is the least researched area of transition. Related work on the meaning of ‘graduateness’ and the development of professional identity underpins this mode and supports the construction of a pedagogy and practice that supports students to successfully transition out of university and into the workplace.

Section Five: Conclusion and Recommendations.

The report concludes with a number of recommendations for future development linked to the areas highlighted in the review of underdeveloped knowledge and understanding.
3. Section one: Definitions of transition

Gale and Parker (2012) state that despite the significant attention given to transitions in higher education by academics and institutions alike, it remains a largely under-developed concept. However, argue that how we define transition often dictates how we manage it. To take account of this, prior to addressing the literature on transitions throughout the student lifecycle, the concept of transitions in higher education is discussed.

Transition as Induction

Hussey and Smith (2010) assert that transitions result in change. They argue that although a student can experience multiple transitions, what all transitions have in common is the fact that they are ‘vital events’ that mark ‘a significant change in a student’s life, self-concept and learning…’ (156). Gale and Parker (2012) offer a straightforward definition maintaining that successful transitions are denoted by the ‘capability to navigate change’ (737) and that change is navigated through and dependent on sectoral and institutional interpretation.

Gale and Parker (2012) argue that there are three main conceptions of transition in the literature and practice: induction, development and becoming. Linking transition to induction positions it at the beginning of the student lifecycle and suggests that transitions are best managed by institutions, with the emphasis on support for student adaptation to the institution.

Arguably this is the dominant discourse in both policy and practice. This interpretation relies on the ability of the student to adapt (or not) to the institution, rather than placing any onus on the university to adapt to the needs of its students. This view is challenged by other authors who express concern regarding the ability of non-traditional students to successfully navigate major transitions without overt mechanisms and clear signposts (Christensen and Evamy 2011, Hussey and Smith 2010, Laing and Robinson 2003, Leese 2010, McKay and Devlin 2014, McMillan 2013 2014, Scutter et al 2011). The need for planned and deliberate support for non-traditional students to underpin transition into university is demonstrated by the following case study example: MAPs for Success, University of Western Australia.

Case study – MAPs for success project

University of Western Australia

The University of Western Australia (UWA) is one of eight prestigious, research intensive institutions in Australia, with a high proportion of traditional school leavers. Until recently, their small (approximately 10 per cent) cohort of mature students has gained admission through standard entry pathways. In 2008, UWA introduced a non-traditional pathway for mature age students: Mature age Access Pathway (MAP), which evolved into the MAPs for Success Project in 2010. This offers students with no formal entry requirements the opportunity to study select degree programmes, with comprehensive pre- and post-enrolment support, designed to aid transition, increase retention and reduce ‘the potential harm’ (Christensen and Evamy 2011: 37) (personal or financial) that students can experience if unprepared for higher education.

Supported by a grant from the University’s Learning and Teaching Performance Fund, staff from across Student Support Services and Admissions designed a suite of events and activities to support transition to and through the first year. This includes pre-entry activities: an information session, mini lecture and short diagnostic assessment provide students (and supporting staff) with individual Learning Action Plans to guide enrolment choices. A full day ‘Study Essentials’ event facilitates peer networking and introduces university systems, support services and the development of core academic and study skills.

Christensen and Evamy (2011) note that mature age students face unique challenges, particularly when compounded with additional barriers such as low socioeconomic status, no previous education experience or have a disability. However, there has been a steady increase in the number of MAP students admitted to UWA since 2008 and since MAPs to Success launched in 2010 there have been fewer students withdrawing during their first semester and a higher number passing all units attempted. There has also been an upward trend in completion rates.
Transition as Development and Becoming

The second conception of transition is that of development and evolution. Hussey and Smith (2010) identify the shift in identity that emerges as students move in and through university. This differs from induction which locates transition in a fixed place and time, and frequently aligns it with the first year. The developmental perspective presented by Hussey and Smith presents transition as a continuous process, ongoing throughout the student lifecycle and accommodating changing and shifting identity. Gale and Parker (2012) identify a further categorisation of transition; becoming. Becoming proposes that transition is not a stand-alone experience, but is an integral part of normal student development and intellectual maturation. Transition therefore is not seen as a linear process but rather as one that accommodates and encompasses the complexities of contemporary student experience.

Transition and Widening Participation

It is evident from the literature that transition is mainly linked to, and aligned with widening participation and the transition of non-traditional students into higher education (Bowl 2001, Egea et al 2014, Goldingay et al 2014, Hussey and Smith 2010, Leese 2010, McKay and Devlin 2014, McMillan 2013 2014, Scutter et al 2011).

In Scotland transition has been linked to the participation of students from areas of multiple deprivation as defined by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD). This is an area-based measure that:

- reveals the worst concentrations of deprivation are;
- shows how areas compare to each other;
- but, does not show the number of individuals in multiple deprivation in each area;
- or, how levels of deprivation change over time.

The SIMD is currently under review, a decade after its introduction to assess the continuing relevance of the measures.

Gale and Parker (2012) assert that the way we define transition denotes how we address it. Therefore, if transition is viewed as an offshoot of widening participation it impacts on how transition activities are funded and to what extent they are mainstreamed within institutions and across the sector.

The link between non-traditional students and transition is a central theme of Leese’s (2010) work. She argues that the ‘massification’ of higher education in England and Wales over the last two decades, has resulted in a commensurate reduction in student support. Leese (2010) draws on Pierre Bourdieu’s earlier work on social and cultural capital to argue that students from non-traditional backgrounds experience transition differently from those from second generation families who she argues are already in possession of these attributes prior to university entry.

Leese (2010) argues that the current trend in student support, targeting and supporting all students, needs to be reversed to prioritise support for non-traditional students. A similar argument is made by McKay and Devlin (2014) who explored the transitional experiences of non-traditional students. They argue that as this group have little or no understanding of how universities work, there is a need for institutions to make ‘the implicit explicit to students’ (1), demystifying academic culture and simplifying language. This is not just in terms of explaining and simplifying subject-based terminology, but, in Bourdieulian terms also the habitus of the university (Bourdieu, 1997). The link between the discourse related to transition and that of widening participation in Scotland is illustrated by the case study below: Schools for Higher Education Programme (SHEP).
Case study – Schools for Higher Education Programme (SHEP)

The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) funds a number of widening participation activities, an example of which is the Schools for Higher Education Programme (SHEP). SHEP is a regionally-based programme of partnership activities between schools, colleges and universities designed to increase progression into higher education. SHEP works with target schools which have less than 22 per cent progression to higher education.

FOCUS West (Focus on College and University Study – West of Scotland) is the largest of the four regional hubs and runs a number of programmes for S3–S6 pupils. This includes University and College Campus Days, during which pupils visit a college or university campus, meet current students and find out about life as a college or university student. The more senior pupils can access the ‘Focus on Four’ programme, a two-day activity-based course hosted by the University of Strathclyde. A key part of this experience is exposure to life on a university campus, including study techniques and exam preparation. The final activity for those pupils within the FOCUS West catchment area considering entering university is the S5/S6 Top-Up Programme delivered by the University of Glasgow (FOCUS West, 2015).

McKay and Devlin (2014) argue that the transitional experiences of non-traditional students can be difficult if they have no family or peer-based experience of university. The comprehensive range of activities provided by SHEP is designed to provide that experience and demystify the culture and language of university, thus building cultural capital and familiarity with the habitus of universities. Participation in the programme builds the pupils’ emotional capital and supports potential students to begin to develop the confidence to adapt, survive and thrive in a university setting.

McMillan (2013, 2014) discusses the problems experienced by non-traditional students, in this instance first generation students transitioning into a dental faculty at a South African university. Like Leese (2010) she examines the social and cultural capital that students have at their disposal. McMillan draws on the work of Reay (2000) (who introduced the concept of emotional capital to the lexicon) to support the position that students who have a familial history of participation in higher education possess a number of emotional resources that first generation students do not. These includes a pre-understanding of university culture often provided by graduate parents, and a feeling of confidence that enables second generation students to adapt to their new environment with greater speed and less anxiety than their ‘first in family’ counterparts. The importance of non-traditional students acquiring tools to develop cultural, social and emotional capital on pre-entry is illustrated by the following case study on The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland’s Transition 20/40 Programme.

Case study – Transitions 20/40

Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

Transitions 20/40 is a pathways project for Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) 20/40 students in the performing and production arts run by The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and provides free-of-charge learning, teaching and mentoring opportunities for Most Deprived 20 and 40 per cent (MD20/40) students. Participation in Transitions 20/40 supports young people to enhance their skills and develop their talent. In addition, the project aims to reduce the social gap by providing students with a mentor and individual Personal Learning Plan (PLP). The mentoring process aims to assist students to build up these networks within the performance and production arts and take ownership of their learning to meet their own career goals.

Figures provided by Transitions 20/40 demonstrate that over a third of their participants will be first-generation students should they progress, with approximately the same percentage attending secondary schools with low progression rates. Like SHEP, this project is funded by the SFC and is also designed to provide widening participation pupils with pre-entry experience of higher education and build confidence and social, cultural and emotional capital.
Widening participation in higher education is an important goal for the Scottish Government, and central to the Commission on Widening Access (COWA) (due to report in spring of 2016). The remit of COWA is to identify barriers to higher education that may result in the exclusion of those from deprived backgrounds and other protected characteristic groups (such as care experienced individuals), to establish both short-term and long-term targets for HE participation. Moreover, COWA has been charged with identifying models of good practice and advising on how these approaches can be scaled up and embedded across the sector. The case studies included in this section and throughout the review demonstrate the extent of work being undertaken, both nationally and internationally to widen participation. Importantly both the literature and case studies demonstrate the importance of the partnerships identified by Scottish Government as key to successfully widening participation.
4. Section 2: Transition into university

The first stage in the student lifecycle is the transition into university. This transition mode and the related focus on the FYE and induction have dominated both the literature and practice development for the past decade. This section explores work undertaken in this area and comments the impact of FYE research on pre-entry and induction. FYE research generally has provided the building blocks for the development of an emerging longitudinal lifecycle approach to transition. (Figure 1)

![Diagram of Transition into university](image_url)

**Figure 1.**

**First Year Experience**

Contemporary transition pedagogy largely emerged as the result of exploration of the First Year Experience (FYE), a key focus in the literature from 2007-2010. Although much of this work aligns transition with the FYE, this is more to do with the FYE movement, research brief, and parameters of the literature. It does not limit or preclude transferability to a lifecycle approach; rather it provides an underpinning knowledge base on which to build. A lifecycle perspective aligns transition with a developmental process (as opposed to induction or becoming). The student journey is an emerging theme in the literature. This broader, inclusive interpretation views transition as an ongoing, fluid, dynamic process, experienced through university and beyond (Kuh 2008, Healy et al 2014).

Kift et al (2010) anchored transition to the FYE, describing it as:

...a conceptualisation that has the optimal capacity to deliver an integrated and holistic FYE, when intentionally designed first year curriculum is harnessed to mediate the learning experiences of diverse commencing cohorts.

This interpretation reflects Tinto’s (2008) ‘restructuring’ and ‘rethinking’ characterisation of the first year. Moreover, Kift et al (2010) advocate a ‘whole-of-institution approach’ (5), facilitating cross-institution academic and professional partnerships, arguing that: ‘the FYE is everybody’s business’ (8).

Liverpool John Moore’s University Sports Development transition programme, outlined in the case study below, reflects Kift et al’s (2010) principles on transition, in particular supporting activities that align with the concept of transition as a process achieved over time, rather than a short-term strategy. In this case study, participation in learning communities is an integral part of the transition programme. In particular, the themes of ‘introspective and discipline-based engagement’ and ‘inter-relational engagement’ (with staff and peers) emerge, highlighted by Thomas (2012) as important for the development in all students, of belonging, engagement, and confidence.
Case study – The relationship between engagement and transition: a subject-based approach

Liverpool John Moores

Liverpool John Moores University run a five-week transition programme for all the entrants to their Sports Development degree programme. An evaluation of the transition programme was undertaken and the study analysed the success of the programmes’ innovative student-focused activities on engaging students through their early transition into university by investigating their relationships with others (both students and staff), learning contexts and the subject. The findings that emerged showed that transition programmes which provide an intensive, innovative and varied timetable with a dedicated student-centred staff team contribute to enhancing student engagement. The study also found that students should have a clear understanding of the aims and objectives of such programmes to assist with their transition and the importance of peer-to-peer support and tutor-student relationship should be embedded in their structures.

The alignment of transition with pre-entry and induction emerged principally from research undertaken as part of the FYE. In terms of usefulness and transferability, contemporary views and approaches to transition can benefit from much of the FYE work. The curriculum principles outlined by Bovill at el (2008), Kift et al (2010), and the perspectives adopted and described by Tinto (2006, 2007) and Whittaker (2008) are equally applicable and to a longitudinal lifecycle approach to transition.

Penn-Edwards and Donnison (2011) move transition beyond the FYE, citing the earlier work of Upcraft et al (2005) to argue for an extension of transition activities beyond the first year. They state that this is needed to maximise the opportunity for students to deploy activities throughout their programme of study, arguing that students do not operate on semester or yearly cycles and are more likely to access opportunities as and when the need arises; not just in the first year of study. This view builds on the work Kift et al (2010) but removes the FYE boundaries to support an emerging view of transition as into, through and out of university.

Kift et al (2010) highlights the body of knowledge that has emerged and is focussed on the first year university experience in both practice and research. Collectively this work establishes a link between a positive first year experience, retention and subsequent successful completion (Whittaker 2008, Trowler 2010, Thomas 2012, Healey et al 2014). Kift et al (2010) and Trowler (2010) suggest that research into practice in this area has largely been undertaken in a piecemeal and disconnected fashion. Whittaker (2008) and Benske et al (2011) concur that for transition support to be fully effective a more strategic and co-ordinated approach is required. Krause et al (2005) further argue that ‘we have now reached the stage where universities must recognise the need for institution-wide approaches...’ (89). Kift et al (2010) find that despite strong recommendations from the literature, institutions are still experiencing difficulties bringing together the work undertaken by individuals and departments to form a cohesive approach that successfully combines academic and support functions. As such, they propose a ‘transition pedagogy’ that aligns the professional and the academic spheres.

Transition Pedagogy

Kift et al (2010) use Wilson’s (2009) theory of generations to inform a transition pedagogy that describes a third generation approach to the first year experience. This is focussed on an ‘intentional first year curriculum design that carefully scaffolds, mediates and supports first year learning for contemporary heterogeneous cohorts’ (8). Kift et al (2010) propose an overarching framework and an architecture that is reflective of contemporary literature; where transition is increasingly aligned to the academic sphere and student engagement (Thomas 2012, Thomas et al 2015). The curriculum principles proposed are:

- Design
- Transition
- Engagement
- Diversity
- Assessment
- Evaluation
Kift et al (2010) offer a transition pedagogy based on an approach that integrates curricular and co-curricular activities within an inclusive mainstream curriculum to ‘do serious transition and retention work’ (7). Applying this definition to practice broadens the definition of curriculum and moves it into the wider academic sphere.

Thomas (2012) argues that educational interventions should not be targeted at specific groups, but used to benefit all students. Moreover, she maintains that the academic sphere is of central importance and that it is through the curriculum that students master and make sense of their subject; develop confidence and develop a sense of belonging and engagement. Kift et al (2010) and Thomas (2012) also maintain that to achieve a sustainable, dynamic and embedded transition, early and ongoing partnerships must be established to support the activity within the academic sphere.

The development of transition pedagogy designed to support transition and retention work is a central consideration of the EnTICE Project case study example below.

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**Case study – Enhancing Transitions in Civil Engineering (EnTICE) Project**

**University of Strathclyde**

The main aim of the HEA-funded EnTICE project is to carry out primary research to develop a package of academic, mentoring and peer support to enhance the transition from school to civil engineering degree programmes at the University of Strathclyde for two key, under-represented demographic groups, namely female and MD20 students. Although the support package developed from this research is anticipated to most benefit these two groups, it will be made available to all first year civil engineering students.

In parallel with the development of this support package, the first year curriculum is currently under review to better align it with the knowledge and skills bases of entrants, to embed the application of civil engineering across the curriculum and to develop the academic, practical, and professional skills necessary for the later years of the course. Female students tend to opt out of studying physics before they have exposure to engineering, therefore curriculum changes and support measures are being investigated to accommodate students without Higher Physics. These measures will benefit the target groups and all students entering with weaker physics qualifications. The research undertaken to develop the pedagogical support package will also inform the curriculum review and support measures will be implemented concurrently with the revised curriculum.

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**Articulation: When the first year is not the first year**

The way in which transition is interpreted impacts on practice. In Scotland, as in the rest of the United Kingdom (RUK), transition is mainly contextualised to the first year. In Scotland the transition mode that has arguably received most attention in both policy and practice is articulation from college to university; defined by the SFC as:

*Students gaining entry into second year of a degree with a Higher National Certification (HNC) or to third year of a degree using a Higher National Diploma (HND) obtained in a college as an entry qualification.* (SFC 2011: 7)

The Scottish Government has provided universities with discrete funding to support articulation since 2003 (SFC 2012). This funding is administered and monitored by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). In May 2007 the SFC tabled a paper Articulation: Proposals for Future Strategy. The report contained within this paper Articulation for All? presented a range of strategies based on the original recommendations from an earlier paper Learning for All. Learning for All made three main recommendations: firstly that colleges and HEIs should work in partnership to develop more effective and joined-up routes from HN to degree-level study; secondly that student support mechanisms should be developed in the form of both generic and subject-specific bridging programmes to ensure that students made a successfully transition from college to university; and thirdly that good practice in joint course design and college-university partnerships should be shared across the sectors.

The need for curriculum focussed partnerships to address the needs of students transitioning from college to university is illustrated in the case study example below, College University Subject Partnerships at Glasgow Caledonian University.

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Case study – College-university subject partnerships

*Glasgow Caledonian University*

Wenger’s (1998) model of Communities of Practice (CoP) model influenced the formation of the first (Glasgow based) College University Subject Partnership (CUSP) in nursing. The CUSP was established in 2010 when lecturing staff from Glasgow Caledonian University and the degree programme partner colleges came together to discuss a wide range of issues relating to their subject area including: curriculum gaps between the degree programme and its feeder HN; the differences in learning, teaching and assessment methods between the institutions; and subject-specific transition issues. Due to the positive feedback from the Nursing CUSP the decision was taken to extend the model to other subject areas that admitted articulating students and a large number of CUSPs were established in diverse subject areas such as: Social Sciences; Engineering; Life Sciences; and the Built Environment.

The work of the CUSPs encompassed many of the transition pedagogy principles as not only did they focus on the curriculum as an organising framework through which to support transition, engagement and diversity. They also addressed curriculum design and assessment. Moreover, the underpinning conditions of an inclusive broad approach to the curriculum supported by strong partnership working were central to the work of the CUSPs. The CUSPs have been highlighted by the SFC as an example of good practice (SFC 2012) and although they were developed by the Greater Glasgow Articulation Partnership to support articulation, the model is highly transferable and can be adopted to support transition throughout the student lifecycle.

Five regional Articulation Hubs were established by the SFC to develop articulation, as was a sixth Hub which was based in the Open University (SFC 2008). The priorities for the Hubs were to develop a sustainable infrastructure to support, develop and increase articulation. The recommendations made by ‘Learning for All?’ to support the development of articulation and the transition of students into university echoes the transition pedagogy developed by Kift et al (2010). In practice, the operational models developed by the Hubs varied, but an examination of the work of the Greater Glasgow Articulation Partnership (GGAP) demonstrates the positive impact of transition when the first year on campus may not be year one of a university programme of study. One such example is the Enhancing Student Transition Programme, outlined in the case study below, designed to support students entering directly into SCQF (Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework) Level 9 of an undergraduate degree programme.

Case study – Enhancing student transition into BA Management, Technology and Enterprise

*Glasgow Caledonian University*

The Enhancing Student Transition project was undertaken by Barlow and McCann (2010) and was designed to support students articulating into the BA (Hons) Management, Technology and Enterprise (MTE) ‘2+2’ degree programme at GCU. In addition to enhancing student transition the project aimed to improve student achievement, progression and was specifically developed for Level Three entry.

Kift et al (2010) argue that three key conditions are required to support the development of a third generation transition pedagogy. The degree programme was developed as a 2+2 degree centred on an inclusive curriculum that was designed taking cognisance of the different learning, teaching and assessment methods the students had experienced at college. In respect of bringing together curricular and co-curricular activities, this was very much at the forefront of the transition activities. For example, a Facebook group was established for students where they could take part in subject-based discussions and activities. This was of central importance given that the students were entering Level Three of the degree programme, it provided an opportunity to develop relationships with their peers prior to commencement of their studies. Finally, an Advisory Group with representatives from the degree programme and all the partner colleges was established to oversee the development of the transition programme.
Sector and institutional interpretation of transition, whether regarded as an activity grounded in the first year experience (Mayes 2009, Kift et al. 2010) or as a ‘whole student journey’ (Coates 2007, Kuh 2008) impacts on policy and academic practice. Gale and Parker (2012) note that much of the literature views transition mainly as an induction activity. Although case study examples demonstrate that this interpretation influences practice, the contemporary models now emerging from the literature also take account of the developmental nature of the student lifecycle and need to prepare the students for their journey through and out of university as well as into.
Transition research is often undertaken as small scale qualitative case studies (Trowler 2010). Collectively however the literature builds a strong case for contemporary interpretation of transition to reflect the student life cycle, located firmly within the academic sphere (Thomas 2012). This section focuses on an exploration of a contemporary interpretation of transition pedagogy.

Trowler (2010), Thomas (2012), Healy et al (2014) and Thomas et al (2015) have widened the debate by challenging the original interpretation of transition into university; exemplified by articulation in Scotland, and the RUK wide focus on the FYE. Collectively they expanded the definition of transition to encompass broader areas of confidence, belonging and engagement. (Figure 2.)

Definitions of Engagement

While the value and importance of student engagement is acknowledged (Trowler 2010, Kahu 2013), Kahu (2013) argues that the real barrier to student engagement and ultimately the ability to measure success, is the inability to differentiate ‘…between the state of engagement, factors that influence engagement and immediate and longer-term consequences of engagement’ (758). Kahu summarises three dominant perspectives that frame student engagement within higher education. These are: a behavioural perspective, focussing on teaching practice; a psychological perspective emphasising only the individual at the centre of engagement, and the Socio-cultural perspective which places understanding within the broader socio-political context.

Kahu argues that while there are some merits in these first two models, there are a number of weaknesses which overshadow their strengths. The first is limited by an inability to capture the broader concepts of engagement beyond the individual student and the second fails to fully recognise the extent to which institutional context can shape student engagement. Kahu (2013) believes that ‘[e]ngagement is fundamentally situational – it arises from the interplay of context and individual’ (763). Kahu (2013) therefore promotes the third perspective: a socio-cultural model and its influence on the ‘bigger picture’ of engagement. This model connects the context with the individual. The social-cultural dimension takes into account the broader, inter-linked perspectives that influence engagement such as external policy drivers, institutional culture and the support in place for students. This model of engagement forms the basis of a transition pedagogy that supports students through university.
Student Engagement and Transition

From 2007-2009 the literature mainly reported a system whereby the university provided students with pre-determined opportunities accessed as part of a ‘transition package’. The literature (highlighted in part one of this review), located transition in place (articulation) and time (FYE). However, transition through university is now increasingly more likely to be co-created and co-located; a collaborative and student partnership focussed activity (Andrew et al 2015). Contemporary definitions of transition emerging in the literature suggest that it should focus on building confidence, engagement and belonging (Thomas 2012, Andrew and Whittaker 2013). Furthermore the National Union of Students (NUS) (2014) suggest that universities agree on a set of ‘behaviours and practices’ that demonstrate the core values of the institution and enshrine them within their institutional student commitment (5).

One institution that has agreed a number of behaviours and practices and has made an institutional-level commitment to student engagement is Glasgow Caledonian University through its ‘Engage’ initiative, outlined in the case study below.

Case study – GCU Engage

_Glasgow Caledonian University_

In 2014 a small team of student representatives, academic, professional staff at GCU collaborated to develop a model of student engagement that aimed to enhance the student experience through a visible, integrated and embedded institutional approach to student engagement and partnership working. GCU aligns with the sector, which identifies two main domains: improving motivation of students to engage in learning and to learn independently and participation by students in quality enhancement and quality assurance processes, resulting in the improvement of their educational experience (QAA 2014).

Student engagement at GCU is designed to have a 'wide reach': incorporating the academic sphere, student body and professional services. Engage is situated in 'a fluid space between and among academic and professional domains' (Trowler 2010: 43). Contemporary Student engagement aligns with adult to adult transaction and reflects the key messages of Thomas (2012). This is cultural paradigm shift; one that acknowledges students as co-producers and co-creators (adult to adult) and not just the ‘end stage’ recipients of knowledge (adult to child). Student Engagement at GCU offers a collaborative, fluid space, underpinned by crossover and parallel working amongst students, academics, professional support staff and senior managers and managers.

In 2014, GCU established GCU Engage, founded on a partnership between the Students’ Association and the University. This project is the outcome of the work of a team of students, academics and professional support staff working collaboratively, over a period of two years to establish an institutional level approach to student engagement and partnership working. GCU Engage aims to enhance the student experience through a visible, integrated and embedded institutional model of student engagement and partnership working. The project reflects the sector definition (QAA UK Quality Code 2012) which identifies two domains of student engagement:

- Improving motivation of students to engage in learning and to learn independently.
- Participation by students in quality enhancement and quality assurance processes, resulting in the improvement of their educational experience.

It also reflects the sparqs (Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland) Student Engagement Framework (2011) five key elements of effective engagement:

- Students feeling part of a supportive institution.
- Students engaging in their own learning.
- Students working with their institution in shaping the direction of learning.
- Formal mechanisms for quality and governance.
- Influencing the student experience at national level.

GCU Engage represents an institutional paradigm shift; one that acknowledges students as co-producers and co-creators and not just the ‘end stage’ recipients of knowledge. The project offers a collaborative, fluid space, underpinned by crossover and parallel working amongst students, academics, professional support staff and senior managers and managers.
Thomas (2012) moved the interpretation of transition into the arena of student engagement and belonging with the publication of the final report of the ‘What Works’ Retention and Success Project (Phase One). This report provides a series of alternative approaches to improving retention and success in higher education and highlights the importance of confidence and belonging: the result of engaged learning. Successful student engagement is defined by Thomas as supportive peer relations leading to ongoing meaningful interaction between staff and students, including practice development around student confidence and identity. Healey et al (2014) suggest that these characteristics contribute to a ‘whole university experience’ that is relevant at all points of transition and can meet the future goals of both the individual and the institution.

The evaluation of the Belonging Narrative Model developed by RMIT University and outlined in the case study below, supports Thomas’s assertion that developing belonging and student engagement throughout the student journey impact on subsequent retention and success.

Case study – The belonging narrative model

RMIT University

The School of Media and Communication at RMIT University was formed in 2009, resulting from a merger between the former Schools of Applied Communication and Creative Media. This was challenging for staff and the concept of ‘belonging’ began to resonate as important in relation to students and staff within this large new school. As such, a ‘Belonging Narrative Model’ was developed with the aim of improving the student experience over the degree lifecycle; this is reflected in a three tiered model, aligned to the three years of an undergraduate degree. Students develop a sense of identity and belonging incrementally across the three years: first to a ‘diverse disciplinary cohort’, then to the ‘interdisciplinary community of the school’, then as an ‘ethical global citizen’ (Morieson et al 2013: 90).

However, the findings of the evaluation of this model found that engagement is developed incrementally, as the students need to first develop a localised (programme, discipline or professional) sense of belonging prior to developing a wider sense of belonging across their School and University.

Thomas (2012) promotes an approach that firmly locates transition in the academic sphere. Like Kift et al (2010) she asserts that this process should take account of the co and extra-curricular spheres. Current literature now places greater emphasis on transition as a fluid process that follows the student lifecycle. A process rather than product approach is also articulated by Kuh (2008) who describes transition as developmental process, using ‘High Impact Activities’ as the building blocks of productive and ‘deep learning’ over the course of a degree programme, not confined to, or bounded by any particular place or time. Moreover Trowler (2010) believes that students will not transition successfully through university if they feel that they do not belong or if they are not fully engaged with their learning.

An example of the success of ‘high impact activities’ in practice can be found in the projects developed by the Department of Government at University College Cork outlined in the case study below.
Case study – Practicing politics

University College Cork

The Department of Government at University College Cork developed two projects, based on active and participatory learning, to engage undergraduate political science students. The first, ‘Engagement with Purpose’ involved training and supporting students to participate in a full parliamentary committee meeting which was held in the university. Participating students attended workshops in policy research, writing, and presentation skills, delivered by academics and external experts. In addition, they were supported individually to develop and refine their ideas before contributing to the debate. The second project was ‘Government and Politics Review’ and involved students working with staff to create an undergraduate online academic journal of research. Students were supported to be writers, researchers and reviewers and workshops were offered on peer review and feedback, academic writing, poster design and publication.

Thomas (2012) argues that engagement must be developed in the academic sphere and this was a key aspect of both ‘Engagement with Purpose’ and ‘Government and Politics Review’. Moreover, these projects can most definitely be classified as ‘high impact practices’ (Kuh 2008) as they involved group projects and undergraduate research. Zepke and Leach (2010) identified a number of actions that institutions should take to support the development of student engagement and again many of these are evident in these projects. However, although the feedback from participating students was highly positive, participation was lower than hoped. As such, Buckley and Reidy (2014) suggest that further research is needed to explore why the majority of students did not participate in these active learning projects.

Coates (2007) defines transition as ‘a broad construct intended to encompass salient academic as well as certain non-academic aspects of the student experience’ (122) and like Kuh 2008), identifies a number of activities and practices that support transition within a broader definition of the academic sphere. Kuh (2008) believes that ‘high impact practices’ such as collaborative projects and undergraduate research actively build confidence, promote engagement and develop a sense of belonging. In addition, Zepke and Leach (2010) highlight ten actions and opportunities institutions should provide to support the development of student engagement, some of which are evident in the next case study outlining the Transition Tool Box which was developed by the School of Medical Sciences, University of Aberdeen. These are:

- Support the development of self-belief amongst students.
- Support students to develop as both independent learners and work successfully with others.
- Teaching is of central importance.
- Provide opportunities for active collaborative learning.
- Provide students with activities that challenge them and allow them to grow academically.
- Ensure that the institutional culture is welcoming to students from diverse backgrounds.
- Provide support for students.
- Ensure that institutions can adapt to changing student expectations.
- Provide opportunities for students to develop as active citizens.
- Support the development of social and cultural capital.
Case study – Transition toolbox

*School of Medical Sciences, University of Aberdeen*

The School of Medical Sciences at the University of Aberdeen identified high levels of discontinuing students in Level Three of their studies in Medical Science. A series of strategies to enhance transition and progression were developed with the aim of providing sustained support and guidance for a diverse student population. A ‘transition tool box’ encompassing strategy, description, rationale and measures of engagement was designed. The aim of which is to inform students of challenges, but also highlight opportunities to facilitate engagement, development and success throughout Level Three. These include a welcome event, weekly drop-in sessions, support and information from previous students and a Careers Conference. Evaluation of the tool box has shown a year-on-year improvement in student retention.

Zepke and Leach (2010) identified a number of actions that institutions should take that will support students to develop a sense of engagement and many of these are present within the transition tool box. The welcome event and drop-in sessions ensure that students are supported and are made to feel welcome by the institution thus facilitating a sense of belonging. Moreover, events such as the Careers Conference support the development of social and cultural capital and that of self-belief.

The work undertaken by Trowler (2010), Thomas (2012), Healy et al (2014) and Thomas et al (2015) focus on the importance of confidence; belonging and engagement and provide a contemporary interpretation: as a process deeply embedded in the academic sphere. Furthermore, the principals and conditions identified by Kift et al (2010) as key the movement of students into university also support transition through and out of university.
6. Section Four: Transition out of University

Overall the literature reveals that the main focus of transition research has been (up to comparatively recently), transition into (building on the FYE) and to a lesser degree through university. Although the language of transition is not commonly used in relation to the concept of ‘out of university’, research focussed on employability and graduate attributes, common themes in the literature, bring together key aspects of professional identity and employability. These concepts are now more likely to be embedded within the academic sphere, rather than run in parallel to it.

**Figure 3.**

### Employability

The discussion surrounding employability came to prominence in Scotland in 2004 as a QAA Enhancement Theme. The employability theme had three main foci: embedding employability in the curriculum, enhancing employability through co-curricular activities and engaging employers with the curriculum. Like the Transition theme, the curriculum is identified as being of central importance, because as Yorke and Knight (2008) argue; employability in higher education is not simply about graduates getting a job, but rather it is about their ‘suitability for appropriate employment’ (158).

### Professional Identity

The formation of a professional identity is a key stage in the transition out of university and is aligned to, and influenced by, the relationship of the individual with their future professional community. Andrew and Ferguson (2008) identify a process of transitioning into a professional identity characterised by a gradual shedding of the student identity to be replaced by an emerging identification with the new professional or workplace community. They believe that developing undergraduate engagement with workplace communities throughout the student journey promotes a sense of identity and creates a space for students to start to define their place in the professional world.

One programme designed with a view to the student’s future professional identity is the Pharmacy Degree Programme at the University of Strathclyde.
Case study – Redesign of the pharmacy programme

University of Strathclyde

In 2012 the regulator for pharmacy education asked the University of Strathclyde to ‘reformulate the content and structure of the curriculum to demonstrate a fully integrated MPharm degree’ (Boyter and Winn 2015: 1) to meet accreditation standards. This provided the opportunity for staff to consult with students and employers and undertake a full redesign of the content and structure of the degree programme.

The focus of the curriculum is on learning rather than teaching, equipping students with skills needed to become independent lifelong learners. Moreover, there is a greater focus on workshops and opportunities for interaction with both staff and peers that Thomas (2012) notes as being of central importance to developing a sense of belonging. Importantly, given that one of the central aims of the curriculum redesign was to ensure that future graduates meet the needs of the pharmacy profession, graduate attributes have been defined for, and embedded within, the curriculum.

Graduate Attributes

The debate moved over the past decade from the concept of employability as an external activity to the development of specific graduate attributes which Barrie (2004) argues can be defined as ‘the skills, knowledge and abilities of university graduates, beyond disciplinary content knowledge, which are applicable to a range of contexts’ (262). Skills such as independent thought and critical inquiry are highly desirable attributes essential to secure graduate level employment. Students transitioning from university into the workplace need to ensure that their skills and abilities work across occupational boundaries and are applicable to a range of workplace.

Barrie (2004) argues that although generic graduate attributes should be developed regardless of subject discipline, they are not necessarily independent of the subject and identified a number of other key features, namely:

- They are the preserve of a graduate as they gained from the process of undertaking a degree.
- Attributes are named as such because they are more than acquired skills and knowledge.
- They are developed through ‘the usual process of higher education’ (263) and not as a result of participation in additional activities.

Development of graduate attributes is the focus of the Sydney University of Technology Work-Ready Project that took a partnership approach to develop the matrices that form the basis of their wiki site.
Case study – Work-ready Project

The University of Technology Sydney (UTS)

The University of Technology Sydney (UTS) Work-Ready Project was a curriculum review project undertaken within the University’s Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology. The aim of which was to improve the development of graduate attributes by designing work-ready learning activities that were subsequently integrated into the curriculum.

Litchfield et al (2010) state that the first stage of the project was to interview a number of professional societies who had been involved in the degree validation process to ask them to identify a number of key graduate attributes. The project team then proceeded to develop a matrix which included sub-attributes and skills for each identified attribute and these matrices formed the basis for the UTS Work-Ready Project wiki site. The matrices were then contextualised for specific subject areas thus enabling them to be integrated into the curriculum.

Once again the development of graduate attributes is located firmly within the academic sphere. Moreover, Kift et al (2010) argue that three conditions are necessary for the development of transition pedagogy and all three are evident in this project. The outcomes of the project have been the result of strong partnerships between the project staff, subject-specialist academics and employers. In addition, curricular and co-curricular activities have been weaved together to create matrices to support students to develop graduate attributes and successfully transition into professional careers.

Gunn and Kafmann (2011) argue that partnerships between academic and careers professionals are vital for the development of employability and one such example was developed through a collaboration of the Department of Life Sciences and the Careers Service at GCU.

Following feedback from employers Life Science academics and the Careers Service worked in partnership to develop the Skills for Professional Practice for Biosciences 2 module for the year-long MSc Bioscience degree programme. The aim of the module is to enable students to begin to address their professional career development at an early stage of their MSc studies which they can then build upon throughout the remainder of their programme. The ethos of the module is that career development is a lifelong process and the aim is to produce students who are resilient and self-aware. Feedback from participating students demonstrates that they have not only benefitted from the peer support provided, but are also better able to recognise and understand the value of their own skills and abilities. Once again the development of graduate attributes is located firmly within the academic sphere. Moreover, Kift et al (2010) argue that three conditions are necessary for the development of transition pedagogy and all three are evident in this project. The outcomes of the project have been the result of strong partnerships between the project staff, subject-specialist academics and employers. In addition, curricular and co-curricular activities have been weaved together to create matrices to support students to develop graduate attributes and successfully transition into professional careers.

Although the language of transition is not commonly used in respect of this final stage of the student lifecycle, collectively work undertaken on professional identity, employability and graduate attributes build towards a pedagogy that supports the transition out of university. This is the transition mode that has received the least attention in the literature, policy and practice. There is scope for further work on this mode, particularly around the development of professional identity and the concept of ‘graduateness’.
7. Section Five: Recommendations and conclusions

The remit of this review is to provide an overview of theoretical and practice focussed perspectives contributing to the development of a lifecycle approach to transition in through and out of university.

Discourse around transition was originally linked in Scotland with widening participation often interpreted through the lens of articulation, and in common with the RUK, the FYE. Much of the early work undertaken to develop transition practice in Scotland focussed on advancing opportunities for students from areas of multiple deprivation to transition from college to university. Transition activities have often been linked to the FYE and designed to de-mystify university culture and support the development of social, cultural and emotional capital in non-traditional students.

Scottish Government education policy around widening participation has resulted in the country becoming a sector leader. Initiatives such as the Schools for Higher Education Programme and the Scottish Articulation Hubs demonstrate the activity at a national level put in place to support early student development at pre-entry, induction and into the first year of university. This work is specific and mainly targeted towards socially disadvantaged students to promote equality of access, as opposed promoting the wider aspects of student transition in, through and out of university.

Adopting a lifecycle approach to transition moves the debate towards a longitudinal approach to transitioning in, through and out of university. The approach that has underpinned the body of transition knowledge, grounded in the FYE, is undoubtedly that of pre-entry and induction. Collectively this work establishes a link between a positive first year experience and subsequent successful completion of first year (Whittaker 2008, Trowler 2010, Thomas 2012). The FYE research has also provided a foundation, in both theory and practice, for the development of a transition pedagogy that supports students throughout the entire student lifecycle in, through and out of university.

The key elements of the student lifecycle model of transition; in, through and out, identified in this review are summarised in the diagram below.
One of the central theories explored in this review is Kift et al’s (2010) third generation transition pedagogy. The principles and conditions identified by them are common and emergent themes in the literature. This approach brings together curricular and co-curricular activities and promotes active collaboration between academic and professional support services.

The review establishes that transition strategies work most effectively when embedded in the academic sphere and integrated within an inclusive curriculum and that active partnerships between students and staff and students and employers support transition both through and out of university (Whittaker 2008, Kuh 2008, Trowler 2010, Gale and Parker 2012, Thomas 2012, Healy et al 2014, Andrew et al 2015). The Enhancing Student Transition project undertaken by Barlow and McCann at Glasgow Caledonian University is an example of the benefits of strong partnerships that continue throughout the duration of a programme or project.

The interpretation proposed by Thomas (2012), encompassed broader concepts of engagement, confidence and belonging and the importance developing these attributes within the academic sphere. The work undertaken by Trowler (2010), Thomas (2012), Healy et al (2014) and Thomas et al (2015) support transition as an ongoing process throughout university and guide contemporary interpretation and structure of a transition pedagogy that follows the student journey and is deeply embedded in the academic sphere. Buckley and Reidy (2014) noted in their study that although student feedback from an extracurricular non-assessed project was extremely positive, participation was lower than expected. This finding again reinforces the importance of integrating transition practice into the academic sphere (Thomas 2012) and the necessity of bringing together curricular and co-curricular aspects within the established curriculum (Kift et al 2010).

The curriculum principles and transition conditions identified by Kift et al (2010) also support the movement of students into, through and out of university. The influence of Kift et al (2010) is illustrated by the Belonging Narrative Model and their model provides a lens for content analysis of the case included in repository annexed to this review.

Kuh (2008) identifies a number of ‘high impact activities’ that support ongoing student engagement. These activities have been highly influential on an international level. The University College Cork politics case study demonstrates high impact practices in action.

The final stage of the student lifecycle is the transition out of university. There has been a great deal of work undertaken in the area of employability and graduate attributes and the principles and conditions identified by Kift et al (2010) and Thomas (2012) are evident in the examples of practice in this area, such as the UTS Work-Ready Project and the Skills for Professional Practice for Biosciences. Collectively this work supports an emerging transition pedagogy, designed to support the final move from student to employee. Andrew and Ferguson (2008) discuss the move from a student identity to a professional identity. They identify a process of transition from the student community (known) to a workplace community (unknown). This is an under researched area that would benefit from further investigation to validate and/or offer support identity transition.

One of the aims of this review was to identify any subject or discipline cluster specific considerations. Both the literature and practice support the conclusion that the majority of transition issues are generic and cut across all subject areas. However, given the importance of the curriculum and the academic sphere to the development of transition pedagogy and engagement, these generic issues are best supported when contextualised within the subject area. One exception to this was highlighted by the EnTICE Project at the University of Strathclyde which has noted that female students in particular are entering engineering courses without the prerequisite physics qualifications and this is an area that may require further research and support.

The review is timely. It feeds into the current QAA Scotland Enhancement Theme of Transition and resonates with the Scottish Government Commission on Widening Access (COWA). COWA has been charged with identifying models of good practice and advising on how these approaches can be scaled up and embedded across the sector.

Kift et al (2010) when developing the third generation transition pedagogy note that research into practice in this area had been undertaken in a piecemeal and disconnected fashion. This review finds that this is still the case. This review and accompanying case study repository highlight examples of good practice both nationally and internationally and as argued by Trowler (2010) these examples, although mainly using small samples collectively begin to demonstrate the merits of developing a comprehensive and inclusive transition pedagogy. Despite the obvious merits and successes of these examples, overall the work undertaken in this area remains relatively small-scale and localised. As far back as 2005, Krause et al argued that universities needed to consider institution and
sector-wide approaches. This was echoed by Whittaker in 2008 who found that a more strategic and co-ordinated approach to transition policy and practice is required.

The themes of confidence, belonging, engagement, partnership, bringing together curricular and co-curricular activities and the importance of situating this activity within the academic sphere are recurrent themes in the literature. The support for transition practice embedded in the curriculum and supporting the student throughout their journey is also frequently highlighted. The review reveals that although we are beginning to understand what works, there is a need to upscale research and practice to develop a common body of knowledge that underpins effective forward movement of an approach to transition that impacts at institutional and sector levels.

**Recommendations**

1. Expand the definition of curriculum to encompass all stages of transition: in, through and out: integrate extra and co-curricular spheres, promote a focus on student engagement and develop pedagogy and strategy around transitional identity and graduate attributes within the mainstream curriculum and broader academic sphere.

2. In Scotland, in light of the SIMD review, reflect on the current emphasis on geographical location and consider aspects beyond physical and situational definitions of deprivation and poverty.

3. Support the implementation of longitudinal transition activities that are inclusive and therefore more likely to be meaningful and useful to all students. These should include consideration, expansion and integration of learning communities: communities of practice: partnerships between academic and professional services staff; staff and students and students and employers.

4. A key message for the sector emerging from literature, policy and practice is the importance of moving beyond pre-entry and the FYE to embed transition activity within a longitudinal student lifecycle model.

5. Policy makers and academics should take cognisance of existing good practice and collectively work towards a scaled up approach to sector and institutional transition practice development linked to the above, the sector in Scotland should undertake a detailed review of transition practice to uncover barriers, validate current effective methodologies and implement scaled up national level pilot projects focussed on innovative practice at all stages of transition. In particular consider the commissioning of work on the currently underrepresented area of transition out of university.

6. Subject-specific transition features in the literature mainly as small-scale, activity based projects and studies. Consider a review of cross sector discipline based transition activities and implement scaled up pilot projects contextualised to a discipline based student life cycle.

**Further Research**

This literature review has prioritised a lifecycle approach to transition. The authors recognise however that the literature reveals multiple interpretations of transition and definitions that range from a straightforward articulation activity to a ‘whole university process’ designed to shape and support identity development throughout student journey and onwards into employment.

The recommendations highlight identified areas for future investigation, in particular the authors would welcome further exploration of the transition mode, of moving students out of university and into the workplace.

In Scotland the review of the SIMD, a decade after its inception, provides the sector with a timely opportunity to revisit the existing definitions of deprivation and the categorisation of students within the existing geographically located and somewhat simplistic index of multiple deprivation.

Overall the review highlights an ongoing opportunity to explore and reflect on the definition of curriculum and the interpretation of transition within the academic sphere. There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that student engagement is most effective when linked to and integrated with the curriculum. Examples of this are abound in the literature but tend to be small scale practice development studies and therefore are lacking in transferability and are challenging to mainstream. There is scope within the sector in Scotland to scale up some of the best examples of this work and sponsor national level projects, with a view to sustainably embedding the ‘best of the best’ into sector and institutional culture, policy and practice.
8. References


McKay, J. and Devlin, M. (2014), 'Uni has a different language...to the real world': demystifying academic culture and discourse for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, *Higher Education Research & Development*, DOI: 10.1080/07294360.2014.890570


University of Strathclyde (2015) EnTICE (Enhancing Transitions in Civil Engineering) Project, Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, Glasgow: University of Strathclyde


9. Curated repository of published pedagogical case studies

BA Management, Technology and Enterprise: Enhancing student transition

*Greater Glasgow Articulation Partnership, Glasgow Caledonian University*

Barlow, A. and McCann, M. Greater Glasgow Articulation Partnership (2010), Glasgow Caledonian University, Glasgow, UK.

**Why?**

In 2009 a subject-based Greater Glasgow Articulation Partnership (GGAP) funded project that addressed transition directly into the third year of a degree programme at Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) was undertaken within the ‘2+2’ BA (Hons) Management, Technology and Enterprise (MTE) programme. A 2+2 degree is a form of degree programme wherein the first and second years of the degree are delivered in a college through the completion of a Higher National Certificate/Diploma and there is no first and second year presented at the university. The MTE programme at GCU ‘… uniquely blends the key fields of management, technology and enterprise into an integrative programme of study. It is a novel product with a particular focus on innovation and creativity and has been specifically developed for level 3 entry’ (3).

**What?**

The objectives of the project were: 'To extend collaborative links between GCU and local colleges through establishing formal articulation agreements, setting up an Advisory Board, comparing approaches to learning and teaching and providing feedback on student progression in terms of entry qualifications; to facilitate and enhance the student transition experience through the use of innovative and creative technologies e.g. podcasts, student blogs, social networking; to familiarise students with the university learning environment including knowledge and understanding of being an independent learner; to develop a programme-specific student mentoring scheme to support and share student experiences within the programme and to disseminate results, highlighting a framework for best practice, to the [then] Caledonian Business School, the wider university network, local colleges and beyond' (3).

**Impact**

There have been a number of positive outcomes from the project. These included: enhanced relationships between GCU and its partner colleges through improving the level of personal interaction and knowledge exchange; producing an ‘Induction and Transition Programme’ for third year entrants; producing university-style referencing guidelines to assist college partners when teaching higher national (HN) students and disseminating the project findings to relevant external stakeholders including the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and the Higher Education Academy (HEA).

**Transition Pedagogy - Mapping**

This GGAP-funded project illustrates many of the aspects of the Curriculum Principles and Strategies identified within Kift et al’s (2010) 3rd Generation Transition Pedagogy Conceptual Model.
The degree programme was developed and delivered within the context of an inclusive curriculum to assist with the transition of a diverse range of students from their prior education experience (college) to third year at GCU. Encouraging students to be actively involved in curricular and co-curricular activities increased their engagement with their studies. In particular, strengthening both staff-student interactions and peer-to-peer collaborations, through employing student mentors, is an example of a curriculum that engages students in learning. In addition, a Facebook group was established for students where they could take part in subject-based discussions and activities. This was of central importance given that the students were entering Level Three of the degree programme, it provided an opportunity to develop relationships with their peers prior to commencement of their studies. These activities had a positive impact on direct entrants’ sense of belonging to the University.

The 2+2 model of curriculum design assisted students both entering the degree programme and progressing through it as well as offering timely access to learning and supports via induction. Addressing differences between college and university with respect to the learning, teaching and assessment approaches enabled direct entrant students to become more familiar with university-style assessment criteria. Strong partnership working via appropriate GCU representation from the programme and the colleges was an important component of the overall development of the degree programme.

Source


College University Subject Partnerships (CUSPs)

*Greater Glasgow Articulation Partnership, Glasgow Caledonian University, Scotland*

**Why?**

This case study provides an overview of one of the key strands of work of the Greater Glasgow Articulation Hub (GGAP), one of six articulation hubs in Scotland set up by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) in 2008 to support and develop articulation. GGAP established the College University Subject Partnerships (CUSPs) through which subject-specialist staff from the college sector and Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) come together to discuss articulation-related issues in their subject areas. The overall aim of the CUSPs is to strengthen the links between colleges and the University to prepare students for the transition into degree study. Wenger’s (1998) model of Communities of Practice influenced the formation of the first CUSP in nursing.

**What?**

The nursing CUSP was established in 2010 when lecturing staff from GCU and the degree programme partner colleges came together to discuss a wide range of issues relating to their subject area including: curriculum gaps between the degree programme and its feeder higher national (HN); the differences in learning, teaching and assessment methods between the institutions; and subject-specific transition issues. Members of the nursing CUSP found their participation extremely beneficial and it was concluded that the CUSP’s ‘primary objective of raising awareness of the range of teaching and learning was achieved’ (Mayne et al 2013: 11). Due to the positive feedback from the nursing CUSP the decision was taken to extend the model to other subject areas that admitted articulating students and a large number of CUSPs were established in diverse subject areas such as: Social Sciences; Engineering; Life Sciences; and the Built Environment.

The opportunity offered by the CUSPs to discuss articulation and transition issues with fellow subject-specialists was welcomed by the membership. A Social Sciences Curriculum Leader from the college sector stated ‘there are limited opportunities even to get together with colleagues from other colleges to discuss delivery of our programmes, so when we were offered the opportunity to meet up with Social Science practitioners from both other colleges and the university sector, we jumped at the chance’ (9). In addition to providing a platform for discussion all of the CUSPs undertook a number of projects including: curriculum mapping projects; an analysis of the performance of college entrants on degree programmes in order to identify any curriculum gaps; and subject-specific transition and engagement activities. A central theme of the early work on the CUSPs was curriculum mapping and a university CUSP member states this was undertaken ‘with a view to understanding opportunities and barriers faced by college students entering the …degree, from Levels One to Three’ (ibid).

**Impact**

The benefits of the CUSPs for both staff and students alike has been noted and one university member stated they ‘have been an exemplar vehicle for promoting much needed closer ties between our University and the wider college community for the benefit of all, in particular for articulating students’ (ibid: 11). The CUSPs have been highlighted by the SFC as an example of good practice (2012) and although they have been developed by GGAP to support articulation, the model is highly transferable and can be adopted to support transition throughout the student lifecycle.

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In  |  Through  |  Out
---|---|---
Subject focussed  |   |  Generic
**Transition Pedagogy – Mapping**

The work of the CUSPs illustrate many of the aspects of the Curriculum Principles and Strategies identified within Kift et al’s 3rd Generation Transition Pedagogy Conceptual Model*.

Not only do the CUSPs focus on the curriculum as an organising framework through which to support transition, engagement and diversity, they also address curriculum design and assessment. Furthermore, through involvement in subject-specific transition and engagement activities, this creates an increased sense of students belonging to the University even while still studying at college. The underpinning conditions of an inclusive broad approach to the curriculum supported by strong partnership working between the University and the colleges are also central to the work of the CUSPs.

**Sources**


Investigating the relationship between student engagement and transition

Liverpool John Moores University, England

**Why?**

This case study provides an overview of research findings assessing the impact of a bespoke early transition programme aimed at enhancing student engagement within higher education. The study analysed the success of the programme’s innovative student-focused activities on engaging students with educationally effective practices by investigating their relationships with others (both students and staff), learning contexts and the subject.

**What?**

The research attempts to address some of the gaps in the literature on student transition into higher education including: traditional research that focuses primarily on very short-term transition strategies and module structures and research into the impact of ‘academic boredom’ and how this affects student engagement (134). The study was conducted with early first year undergraduates on a Sports Development course (104 in total) at Liverpool John Moores University who took part in the five week intensive transition programme. Week one concentrated on how students viewed their beliefs and sense of identity through the lens of the discipline, and weeks two-to-five focused on the core activities of the sports programme. The programme included: ‘innovative learning environments (ILEs) (for example, cartooning, smoothie making, Google mapping), movies, non-traditional physical activities (for example, free running, Speedminton and Rock-it-ball), lectures, website construction, mini research projects, guest speakers, debates and daily reading tasks. Additionally, students spent on average four sessions each week in personal tutor group seminars’ (135). The data gathering exercise to evaluate the success of the programme involved students completing questionnaires at the end of each week and participation in focus groups at the end of the first, third and fifth week of the programme.

**Impact**

The findings that emerged showed that transition programmes which provide an intensive, innovative and varied timetable with a dedicated student-centred staff team contribute to enhancing student engagement. The study also found that students should have a clear understanding of the aims and objectives of such programmes to assist with their transition and the importance of peer-peer support and tutor-student relationships should be embedded in their structures. The authors suggest that while these findings are important when considering the initial transition phase of students into higher education, they also recommended that further research should be undertaken that explores the success of such programmes and associated impact as students’ progress through their university studies.

**Transition Pedagogy - Mapping**

This early transition programme illustrates aspects of the Curriculum Principles and Strategies identified within Kift et al’s (2010) 3rd Generation Transition Pedagogy Conceptual Model.

The five week intensive transition programme supported the focus on transition as a process over time, rather than a very-short term strategy. All of the undergraduates on the course were selected from a diverse range of educational backgrounds.

One of the key features of the design of the transition programme was that it was student-centred. Learning and teaching, promoted through a learning communities approach is an integral part of the transition programme, in
particular the themes of ‘Introspective and discipline-based engagement’ and ‘Inter-relational engagement’. The findings also showed the importance of small group teaching to engage students which reinforces a curriculum that engages students in learning. The activities offered through the ILEs also supported this strategy. Timely access to learning was provided through personal learning sessions which were embedded within the five week programme. What also strongly emerged during the programme was the students’ increased sense of belonging, particularly within their tutor group.

Evaluating the programme to monitor its impact was an important part of it structure. The majority of students enjoyed the activities which indicated that students were positive about the overall programme.

Source


Young Applicants in Schools Scheme – higher education in the classroom to support transitions

The Open University in Scotland

**Why?**

In 2007, there were concerns that sixth year (S6) school pupils in the Highlands and Islands lacked the breadth of curricular choices available elsewhere, putting them at an unfair disadvantage for accessing higher education. The Open University in Scotland (OUiS) worked with The Highland Council to pilot a 'Young Applicants in Schools Scheme' (YASS) to offer pupils across the area wider curriculum choices.

Widening access to higher education in Scotland remains a key Government priority, which is reflected in the OUiS Outcome Agreement as one of the institution's strategic outcomes.

**What?**

Since the pilot in 2007, YASS has grown considerably and is now available across Scotland, delivered by the OUiS and funded by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). It aims to support S6 pupils to bridge the gap between school and further or higher education by studying Open University (OU) level one modules alongside their secondary school curriculum. It aims to aid transition between school and university.

YASS aims to reduce uneven participation in higher education; access to the programme is not restricted by postcode, student numbers or ability to pay. Secondary schools must, however, register for the YASS programme in order to select students for participation. It is a partnership approach between the OUiS, secondary schools and students. Module materials, resources and support are provided by the OU both to the student and school, enabling secondary school coordinators to follow their students’ progress.

Students can access over 30 level one modules (SCQF Level 7) in a number of disciplines including: Arts and Humanities; Business Studies; Engineering and Technology; Law and Mathematics. Students do not have to attend a campus; they can study in their home area with full access to the OU online library and support services. Modules run from 12 to 40 weeks with clear timetables and deadlines. They are structured to enable students to take responsibility for their own learning and begin to develop as independent learners. Modules are designed to build students’ confidence and learning skills (e.g. communication and time management). The suggested YASS support network includes the YASS administrator, school coordinators, parents, other students and OU tutors/student advisors.

**Impact**

From the pilot year in 2007 which had 30 students from 10 schools undertake modules, YASS has grown to support over 700 students in 2014/15. To date, over 3,000 students from 192 schools have participated in an OU module through the scheme. Feedback on the success of YASS indicates a number of success factors which support S6 pupils’ transition into higher education. These include: enhancing independent learning; accessing opportunities to study subjects which would otherwise be unavailable; growing in confidence and developing skills needed for higher education study.

In moving forward, the author notes the need to address some of the challenges faced when seeking to widen participation to higher education, to ensure that as many students as possible from underrepresented backgrounds are able to take part in YASS.
Transition pedagogy – mapping

This initiative illustrates aspects of the Curriculum Principles and Strategies identified within Kift et al’s (2010) 3rd Generation Transition Pedagogy Conceptual Model*.

YASS has been designed to support widening access to higher education across Scotland, addressing uneven participation and diversity issues. Participation is not based on postcode, student numbers or ability to pay, but on established partnerships between the OUS, secondary schools and students. Support is provided by YASS, the OU (academic and professional services), schools and parents. This is an example of wide-reaching academic-professional partnerships that aims to provide structured and holistic support to learners.

Senior secondary school pupils can access over 30 level one modules offered by the OU alongside the school curriculum. Modules are designed to engage students, in particular by promoting independent learning, skills development and engagement with the academic subject. Supporting students to develop academic and life skills is a core aspect of the level one modules.

A key aim of YASS is to bridge the gap between school and university, easing the transition to higher education for a diverse range of learners. Tailored support is provided by academic and professional staff (proactive and timely access to learning and life support) which should help students to develop confidence and begin to foster a sense of belonging to the institution.

The author notes that evaluation of YASS has led to addressing key challenges and enhancing the provision of the scheme over a number of years.

Source


**Good practice for enhancing the engagement and success of commencing students**

*Queensland University of Technology, Australia*

### Why?

Student engagement is crucial for student persistence, retention and success. It is widely accepted that higher education institutions should provide a supportive environment to reduce attrition, facilitate engagement (academic, social and personal) and enable student success. A key challenge for universities is to monitor student engagement and identify students ‘at risk’ of poor progress or withdrawing from their studies (84).

In 2007, Queensland University of Technology (QUT) examined its processes for monitoring students at risk of disengaging with their studies, and explored gaps in relation to interventions, resources and support. This led to the piloting of a Student Success Program (SSP) as part of the wider First Year Experience Program (FYEP). The SSP was designed to identify and offer appropriate support to students thought likely to disengage during their first year at university.

### What?

The SSP was first introduced as a pilot within one faculty and subsequently rolled out across the university. During the pilot phase, Student Success Advisors (SSAs) – who are trained, later-year students – utilised a bespoke Contact Management System to identify students at risk of disengaging with their studies; indicators included attendance, participation, submission of assessments, grades etc. Students were contacted by SSAs via telephone; the SSAs were guided by scripts and supported by generic and discipline-specific resources. This was followed up by email contact – regardless of whether the call attempt was successful or not – either summarising the conversation and agreed action plan, or offering tailored study hints and tips. Students were referred to specialist support services as required.

Following a successful pilot, the SSP expanded beyond one faculty and is now applied across the university at key points throughout the transition process. Four SSP ‘campaigns’ are identified as: pre-semester (support for students who have not accepted their university place or enrolled in a timely manner); weeks 1-4 (welcome calls to students identified as potentially ‘at risk’ or students who did not attend orientation activities); during semester (support throughout the semester as described during the pilot phase); and end of semester (support for students at risk of ‘unsatisfactory academic performance’) (p88).

The four campaigns are underpinned by the QUT policy that successful student transition is ‘everybody’s business’; support offered to students spans academic, administrative, social and personal domains, strengthened by a series of academic and professional staff partnerships (p88).

### Impact

Whilst the authors acknowledge that the SSP is still in its infancy, findings from quantitative and qualitative data analysis indicate that it is an effective intervention to identify and support at risk students at QUT. Data suggests that the program has impacted positively on student persistence and success, leading to positive outcomes in terms of enhancing student retention and persistence for at least a year. Furthermore, the authors suggest it is a useful tool for monitoring student engagement across the institution.
They caution, however, that the SSP is one component of a more comprehensive First Year Experience Program (FYEP) at QUT; its success, therefore, may be at least in part due to the wider environment within which it operates.

**Transition Pedagogy – Mapping**

This program illustrates aspects of the Curriculum Principles and Strategies identified within Kift et al's (2010) 3rd Generation Transition Pedagogy Conceptual Model*.

The SSP is a student-focused intervention, and one of the main components of its design is a four-stage, phased approach to support the first year student lifecycle. It has been designed to mediate and support successful transition both into and through university; in particular, it focuses on supporting at risk students and those who may find the transition process difficult (addressing issues of diversity).

The FYEP and SSP at QUT emphasise the importance of student engagement. The SSP has been designed to keep students engaged throughout the whole first year; peer to peer interaction is embedded through SSA engagement with first year students.

The SSA approach is an example of proactive and timely access to learning and life support; students are contacted and referred to specialist support services if appropriate, including counselling experts. This is also an example of sustainable academic-professional partnerships through close liaison between academic staff and specialist support services.

A robust external evaluation of the SSP indicates that it has made a positive impact on student attrition rates. Feedback from students, SSAs and academic staff is also positive and suggests an increased sense of belonging to the institution. Evidence suggests that the impact of this intervention continues for least a year into study.

**Source**


Belonging in education: lessons from the Belonging Project

**RMIT University, Australia**

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**Why?**
A range of political and social pressures has led to renewed focus on the student experience in Australia. Government targets to attract and retain students from a wider range of backgrounds have led to an increase both in the number, and diversity, of students across the sector.

The School of Media and Communication at RMIT University was formed in 2009, resulting from a merger between the former Schools of Applied Communication and Creative Media. This was challenging for staff, and the concept of ‘belonging’ began to resonate as important in relation to students and staff within this large new school.

**What?**
The authors argue that both academic and social belonging are crucial for motivation, achievement and success at university. The Belonging Project at RMIT aims to move belonging from a theoretical concept to a range of curricular and extra-curricular activities that enable it to be achieved in practice.

A 'Belonging Narrative Model' was developed with the aim of improving the student experience over the degree lifecycle; this is reflected in a three-tiered model, aligned to the three years of an undergraduate degree. Students develop a sense of identity and belonging incrementally across the three years: first to a ‘diverse disciplinary cohort’, then to the ‘interdisciplinary community of the school’, then as an ‘ethical global citizen’ (90). The authors note that the model is not prescriptive; in practice the tiers are likely to overlap across different years of study. It is also intended to be transferable to different contexts and institutions.

The early model was ‘tested’ with academics, professional staff and students: 75 students attended focus groups to map their student experience and reflect on key concerns faced at different points of their student journey. This identified a number of challenges, particularly that of transitioning into first year (both academically and socially). This led to the piloting of two initiatives: taking a more coordinated school-based approach to orientation and a ‘Cohort Day Out’ off-campus (92).

Feedback from students indicated a desire to develop a sense of belonging to the wider school, but stressed the importance of cultivating belonging within their immediate cohort first. Physical and online spaces were identified to help foster interdisciplinary belonging through participation in group and social activities. These included an on-campus common area and virtual Facebook groups.

**Impact**
Evaluation of the Belonging Narrative Model, through focus groups, suggests that students first need to develop a localised sense of belonging (for example, within programmes, disciplines or professions), before developing a wider sense of belonging within their school and university. The School of Media and Communication at RMIT University piloted the use of several events and spaces to help foster this sense of student belonging, both academically and socially. The authors note the importance of promoting a sense of belonging for both students and staff when seeking to enhance the student experience.
Transition Pedagogy – Mapping

This project illustrates aspects of the Curriculum Principles and Strategies identified within Kift et al’s 3rd Generation Transition Pedagogy Conceptual Model.

In order to support an increasingly diverse student cohort, staff at RMIT developed a Belonging Narrative Model, designed to improve the student experience by intentionally fostering a sense of belonging. Covering the three-year degree lifecycle, the model is student-focused, progressive and designed to engage students academically and socially to increase motivation, achievement and success. It aims to support students at key points of transition from pre-entry, through and out of university, providing timely access to learning and life support.

In order to ‘test’ the model, students were invited to map their own experiences and reflect on their own transition journey; this led to a number of initiatives being piloted to enhance key areas of concern, and is an example of students being active participants in the development of this initiative. The approach is based around active learning and collaboration; students are considered to be co-creators of their own learning experience.

Evaluation indicates that fostering a sense of belonging is central to enhancing the student experience and the authors note the importance of both students and staff feeling that they belong. For students, this needs to be incremental and scaffolded; first developing a sense of belonging to their immediate peer cohort, then the wider school, then the university and finally as global citizens.

Source


Transitions 20/40: Facilitating fairer transitions into further and higher education in the performing and production arts

Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

Why?

Students applying to study in a conservatoire such as the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RSC) require ‘extensive and specialist training long before application and audition’ (1). Prospective students require years of performance experience which is costly in terms of time and money; it usually requires considerable, and expensive, private tuition from a young age (e.g. Junior Conservatoire training). This can present significant barriers depending on socio-economic status and can be particularly challenging for students from Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (MD20/40) areas.

The RSC sought to create a fairer admissions process and provide opportunities for a broader range of students with the potential to succeed in music, drama, ballet, production and screen. Key to the process was enabling the institution to identify prospective students’ ability to become elite performers and practitioners, whilst reducing inadvertent elitism within the admissions process.

What?

Transitions 20/40 is a widening access initiative, funded by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), aimed at increasing diversity in performance and production arts. It provides free pre-entry support to talented students from SIMD 20/40 postcode areas. This is done in two main ways. Firstly, the programme aims to reduce the skills gap by providing training to assist prospective students to meet the entry requirements of the RSC (the authors note, for example, that obtaining an Advanced Higher in Music takes candidates to Grade 5 standard in their principal instrument, whilst entry to the RSC requires Grade 8 with distinction).

Secondly, Transitions 20/40 aims to reduce the social gap by providing students with a mentor and individual Personal Learning Plan (PLP). The authors note that success in performing and production arts requires ‘collaborators, sources of advice, support and encouragement, sounding boards and industry role models...tacit learning has long been ingrained in conservatoire pedagogy’ (4). The mentoring process aims to assist students to build up these networks and take ownership of their learning to meet their own career goals. The aim is to support students to manage the social and cultural transition into the RSC, in addition to bridging any skills gaps.

It is noted that Transitions 20/40 can contribute towards the cost of basic stage attire, funding or travel if paying for them is proving to be prohibitive to students’ success.

Impact

The authors suggest that Transitions 20/40 is about enabling MD20/40 students to gain the confidence, knowledge, resources and materials to make informed decisions about their own career and participate fully in the RSC. The initiative aims to close any skills, social and culture gaps that may exist, enabling a more diverse range of students to make a successful transition to performing and production arts, and to prepare for a career that may lack the ‘guaranteed employment of other professions’ (5). The authors argue that this practical and social support should be provided at a much earlier stage in the students’ journey, which is ‘where the inequality really begins’ (5).
Transition Pedagogy – Mapping

This initiative illustrates aspects of the Curriculum Principles and Strategies identified within Kift et al’s 3rd Generation Transition Pedagogy Conceptual Model*.

Transitions 20/40 aims to increase diversity in what is often a very elite area of higher education: production and performance arts in a conservatoire setting. The authors highlight significant barriers for MD20/40 students to meet even the basic entry requirements of the RSC; this pre-entry programme has been designed to provide holistic academic, social and pastoral support to aid transition in and through programmes in music, drama, ballet, production and screen. One broad aim of the project is to ensure a fairer admissions process and fairer transitions into further or higher education.

The project is an example of providing timely access to learning and life support; it aims to bridge the skills, social and cultural gaps that can exist for MD20/40 students in advance of applying to an institution such as the RSC. Students access tuition in their subject area, supported by an academic mentor and individual PLP, designed in part to facilitate early consideration of career planning and tailoring RSC choices accordingly. This encourages them to engage actively with their learning and have the confidence to identify, and work towards, clear career goals.

A clear goal of Transitions 20/40 is to foster a sense of belonging to the RSC in advance of entry, allowing students to interact with staff and begin to develop the essential networks needed to succeed in the highly competitive area of performance and production arts.

Source


(Last accessed 24 September 2015)
Schools for Higher Education Programme

Why?

FOCUS West (Focus on College and University Study – West of Scotland) is the largest of the four regional hubs and runs a number of programmes for S3–S6 pupils. These include University and College Campus Days, during which pupils visit a college or university campus, meet current students and find out about life as a college or university student. The more senior pupils can access the ‘Focus on Four’ programme, a two-day activity-based course hosted by the University of Strathclyde. A key part of this experience is exposure to life on a university campus, including study techniques and exam preparation.

The final activity for those pupils within the FOCUS West catchment area considering entering university is the S5/S6 Top-Up Programme delivered by the University of Glasgow (FOCUS West, 2015). The aims of Top-Up are to:

- Facilitate progression to higher education for school pupils from areas of low progression;
- Help pupils prepare for higher education;
- Equip pupils with key skills for successful study;
- Help pupils improve on existing skills;
- Introduce pupils to campus life;
- Help boost pupils’ confidence in their own abilities;
- Help pupils make a smoother transition into student life; and
- Help raise levels of achievement and attainment’ (ibid).

McKay and Devlin (2014) argue that the transitional experiences of non-traditional students can be difficult if they have no family or peer-based experience of university. The comprehensive range of activities provided by SHEP is designed to provide that experience.

Impact

Top-Up works with approximately 1200 S5 and S6 pupils each year who are considering progressing to university and provides them with ‘a mini higher education experience’ to prepare them for university study (FOCUS West, 2015). Successful participants receive a student profile and admissions officers can adjust one Higher by one point when considering their applications.

Feedback from many of the pupils who have participated in the programme about their experiences has been positive and the range of activities offered through the programme has made them more confident about undertaking the next step into college or university. One pupil stated: ‘I feel better prepared because Top-Up makes the first few weeks of university less daunting as you know how lectures and seminars are conducted.’ While another thought the programme provided a ‘[v]ery enjoyable and vivid insight into higher education. Tutors are extremely helpful and friendly’ (ibid).

Transition Pedagogy – Mapping


The programmes are an example of supporting the transition of a diverse range of students from their prior education experience into higher education. Appropriate scaffolding runs through the design of SHEP programmes.
By helping school pupils to become familiar with college/university prior to attending increases their sense of engagement with, and belonging, to the institution. Activity-based courses that include preparing pupils for university-style exams make them aware of the level and standard of assessment expected.

One of the keys to the success of SHEP and its regional hubs is its emphasis on partnership activities between schools, colleges and universities designed to increase progression into higher education.

Source


Why?

The main aim of the Higher Education Academy (HEA) funded EnTICE (Enhancing Transitions In Civil Engineering) project, which commenced in 2015, is to carry out primary research to develop a package of academic, mentoring and peer support to enhance the transition from school to civil engineering degree programmes at the University of Strathclyde for two key, under-represented demographic groups:

- women, with a particular focus on those who are well-qualified but may not have studied Higher Physics and therefore would not normally pursue a degree in civil engineering; and
- students from the 20% most deprived areas in Scotland (MD20) who may be the first in their families and among their friends to attend university.

Under-representation of these target groups in civil engineering has been widely recognised in recent years. Scottish Funding Council (SFC) figures show that the percentage of female students entering engineering subjects in Scottish higher education institutions in 2013-14 was 12.3% (21). Female undergraduates recruited to the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering typically comprise 15-20% of the intake (University of Strathclyde, 2015). Likewise, approximately 15% of current intake is recruited from the 40% most deprived areas of Scotland (ibid). Students from these groups are likely to have low to mid-range entry qualifications or be under-qualified in physics, which is currently a required subject for entry. They may also lack the economic and social capital that helps make a successful transition to university. Although the support package developed from this research is anticipated to most benefit the two key groups, it will be made available to all first year civil engineering students.

What?

In parallel with the development of the support package, the first year curriculum is currently under review to better align it with the knowledge and skills bases of entrants, to embed the application of civil engineering across the curriculum and to develop the academic, practical, and professional skills necessary for the later years of the course. Female students tend to opt out of studying physics before they have exposure to engineering. SFC figures show that in 2013 only 29% of pupils who sat the Higher Physics exam were female. This figure reduced to 21.8% for the Advanced Higher Physics (17). Therefore curriculum changes and support measures are being investigated to accommodate students without Higher Physics. These measures will benefit the target groups and all students entering with weaker physics qualifications. The research undertaken to develop the pedagogical support package will also inform the curriculum review and support measures will be implemented concurrently with the revised curriculum.

First year students in the department participate in an induction programme that includes construction and team building activities in the first six weeks of their degree. Third year students take part in a graduate mentoring programme, and the department operates a buddy scheme wherein senior students mentor groups of first year students. Given their recent experiences on degree programmes in the department, as well as their prior-educational attainments and exposure to induction and mentoring opportunities, primary information from current undergraduates will be obtained through focus groups and other data gathering exercises designed to ensure representation from the target groups as well as the wider student body. Such student involvement will be central to designing the support package.
The pedagogical support package will be developed by carrying out the following tasks:

- Mapping pre-university educational pathways and attainments of each target group in relation to the existing first and second year curricula;
- Collating and strengthening current evidence concerning both the under-representation of the target groups and their subsequent performance on the programme, so that it can be used to benchmark the effectiveness of the new support programme following implementation;
- Identifying academic gaps and mentoring/peer support needs of each target group specific to successful transitions;
- Developing a tailored approach mixing academic assistance, mentoring, and peer support for each target group, integrated, where appropriate, across the year group; and
- Designing an implementation programme and evaluation framework to enhance quality of education in the vital early years through establishing a common base of knowledge and skills, better supporting all learners.

Impact

The outcomes from both (a) the research that will lead to the development of a support package and (b) the curriculum review will shape the future promotion, recruitment strategy, and selection of students by the department. By improving educational and mentoring practices to support students through the critical transitions early in their university studies, the aim is to increase retention, improve diversity, and contribute more well-qualified civil engineers to the profession.

Transition Pedagogy - Mapping

The EnTICE project and curriculum review illustrates aspects of the Curriculum Principles and Strategies identified within Kift et al's (2010) 3rd Generation Transition Pedagogy Conceptual Model*.

Due to the centrality of the academic sphere and the focus on curriculum development the EnTICE project is not only developing a transition pedagogy that will support transition into university through aligning pre-entry pathways with higher education study but is also developing a model to support transition and engagement throughout the student lifecycle and out into employment. Focusing on strategies to address low participation in higher education from women and MD20 students emphasises the importance of attracting students from a diverse range of backgrounds. Through participating in the induction and by reviewing the design of the first year curriculum to reflect the knowledge and skills of entrants and to equip them for subsequent years of study, will enhance further their transition into, through and out of university.

Later year students who are involved in the graduate mentoring programme and first year mentees who receive relevant guidance and support stress the importance of not only having in place a curriculum that engages students in learning but will make students feel they belong within the department and the institution. Student involvement in designing the support package will also enhance their engagement and belonging. Developing a tailored approach incorporating a range of supports not only for each target group but potentially rolled out to all of the students demonstrates the importance of timely access to learning and life support and is also an example of a whole-of-institution-approach to the transition process.

As part of the curriculum design, implementing an evaluation framework appears to be a key objective of the pedagogical support package.

Source

Redesign of the pharmacy programme

University of Strathclyde

Why?

In 2012, the regulator for pharmacy education asked the University of Strathclyde to ‘reformulate the content and structure of the curriculum to demonstrate a fully integrated MPharm degree’ to meet accreditation standards (1). This provided the opportunity for staff to consult with students and employers and undertake a full redesign of the content and structure of the degree programme.

Feedback from employers and current students indicated that the pharmacy degree at Strathclyde was highly regarded but students felt it could be more joined up, particularly in relation to putting science into practice. They also felt that the workload was too high, at 150 SCQF credits over four years, compared with the more usual 120 credits over five years for an integrated Master’s degree.

What?

It was acknowledged that most students have Advanced Higher qualifications upon entry to the pharmacy programme at Strathclyde; a starting point, therefore, was to introduce a policy for direct entry into Year two (SCQF 8), with a clear route of entry into Year one for students who cannot undertake Advanced Highers or equivalent. Diagnostic assessment in week one aims to ensure that all students have the required understanding of chemistry to succeed as a pharmacy student; revision and support is offered if there are any gaps in knowledge. Student workload was revised to comply with the SCQF norm of 120 credits in each year, taking into account pre-entry credit gained at SCQF 7.

The redesigned curriculum is progressive, designed to integrate science and practice in increasingly complex ways as students advance through the programme. It has been designed to be transdisciplinary with a focus on body systems and illnesses. Experiential learning is incorporated into all years of the programme; students use their learning of science in practice. The focus of the curriculum is on learning rather than teaching, equipping students with the skills needed to become independent lifelong learners. The number of lectures has been reduced with greater focus on workshops and opportunities for student-student and student-staff interaction.

Assessment has been changed to make constructive alignment between the forms of assessment and the intended learning outcomes. Personal Development Advisors (PDAs) provide regular support, corresponding with the release of assessment marks; students meet with them at least twice per semester and are encouraged to discuss study skills and sources of support.

Graduate attributes have been defined for, and embedded within, the curriculum. The strategy develops and supports a curriculum that engages students in their learning and prepares them for the transition to careers in pharmacy or other employment after university.

Impact

The authors suggest that curriculum design has led to a more integrated degree programme where, from the outset, students are aware of the relevance of teaching and learning to the practice and delivery of pharmacy. It has broken down boundaries between discipline areas and ensured that lectures, workshops and laboratories align closely with each other, having been designed by a transdisciplinary class team.

The authors note the importance of involving key stakeholders in programme design – including staff, students and employers – to ensure that future graduates meet the needs of the pharmacy profession.
Transition Pedagogy - Mapping

This curriculum redesign illustrates aspects of the Curriculum Principles and Strategies identified within Kift et al’s 3rd Generation Transition Pedagogy Conceptual Model*

The MPharm degree at the University of Strathclyde has been carefully designed in consultation with staff, students and employers to ensure clear alignment of teaching and learning to future practice. The curriculum is progressive, scaffolded and builds upon students’ prior learning at SCQF 7 (Advanced Higher). Students are supported to make the transition into Year two of study (SCQF 8); diagnostic assessment is used to identify any knowledge gaps on entry to the programme, with revision and PDA support available as required. The curriculum is aligned to the development of graduate attributes, aiming to equip students with the skills and knowledge needed to progress successfully throughout the programme and into employment after university.

Student engagement is designed into the programme with a clear focus on learning rather than teaching approaches. This is evidenced through a reduction in lectures and a move towards ‘flipped classroom’ and workshop delivery, with increased opportunities for student interaction with staff and peers. Interactive technologies, such as handsets, are used to increase opportunities for interaction with, and feedback from, students. Assessment is progressive, makes constructive alignment with clear learning outcomes and incorporates formative feedback, linked to regular PDA meetings.

Teaching is undertaken by a team of academics with expert help from the NHS, community pharmacy and expert patient groups. Some role playing activities are delivered by specialist agencies (sustainable academic-professional partnerships). The authors acknowledge the importance of involving staff, students and employers in programme design to increase engagement and ensure that the programme delivers graduates to meet the needs of the pharmacy profession.

Source


Contextualising and integrating into the curriculum the learning and teaching of work-ready professional graduate attributes

The University of Technology Sydney (UTS), Australia

Why?

The University of Technology Sydney (UTS) Work-Ready Project was a curriculum review project undertaken within the University’s Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology. The aim of the review was to improve the development of graduate attributes by designing work-ready learning activities that were subsequently integrated into the curriculum. A strategic aim within UTS is to better prepare graduates for the workforce and future career success.

What?

The first stage of the project was to interview representatives from a number of professional societies who had been involved in the degree validation process to ask them to identify a number of key graduate attributes. The initial representation was from the subject areas of Business and Information Technology (IT) and later joined by colleagues from Engineering, Law, Nursing, Midwifery, Health and Science. The most important attributes identified from all the societies included:

- Ethics and professionalism;
- A global perspective;
- Communication capacity;
- Ability to work well in a team;
- Ability to apply knowledge; and
- Creative problem solving and critical thinking skills’ (p521).

The project team identified 12 key attributes overall and proceeded to develop a matrix which included sub-attributes and skills for each and these matrices formed the basis for the UTS Work-Ready Project wiki site. Following the development of the matrices, academic staff and professional support staff, including careers and library professionals, worked in partnership to develop a number of learning activities. This allowed for the development of a number of matrices that were contextualised for specific subject areas thus enabling them to be integrated into the curriculum.

There were a number of stages in the contextualising process, the first of which was to design and publish the generic attribute matrices. Once this was completed the process of contextualisation was started by project staff. Academic staff were then brought on board to review and further develop the subject-specific elements, after which they integrated the activities into their curriculum. Finally, both academic staff and students evaluated the contextualisation process for possible refinements and improvements to design.

Impact

Curricular and co-curricular activities have been weaved together to create matrices to support students to develop graduate attributes and successfully transition into professional careers. An evaluation of the UTS Work-Ready Project and website was conducted. This allowed for qualitative feedback that would generate emerging themes to address any issues relating to incorporating learning and teaching of work-ready attributes into the curriculum. Feedback from academics was generally positive particularly with respect to structure and ease of navigation through the website and for sharing of resources to enhance teaching and administration. Potential improvements
to the website were proposed including introducing a tracking process to gauge how frequent academics accessed
the website, monitor overall use of individual activities and implement a cross-reference system to reduce
duplication.

Over 300 work-related learning activities were developed and placed on the website which could be accessed
across UTS-wide curricula. Feedback on possible improvements to contextualise learning activities within each
faculty is being undertaken.

Transition Pedagogy - Mapping

The Work-Ready Project illustrates aspects of the Curriculum Principles and Strategies identified within Kift et al’s

Incorporating a contextualised and integrated approach into the design of the curriculum motivated and engaged
students in their learning and increased their feeling of belonging. Being able to access the work-related activities
across UTS’s diverse curricula stresses the inclusivity of the project. As well as conducting an evaluation of the
project’s website, academics and students evaluated the contextualised activity for redesign and improvement.
This joint-evaluation strategy enhanced staff-student collaboration which in turn increased a sense of engagement
and demonstrates a curriculum that engages in learning. Following the development of the matrices, academic
staff and professional support staff, including careers and library professionals worked in partnership to develop a
number of learning activities. The outcomes of the project have been the result of strong partnerships between the
project staff, subject-specialist academics and employers.

Sources

of policy and practice for the higher education sector. The International Journal of the First Year in Higher

Litchfield, A., Frawley, J. and Nettleton, S. (2010) Contextualising and integrating into the curriculum the learning
and teaching of work-ready professional graduate attributes. Higher Education Research and Development, Vol.29,
No.5, pp. 519-534.
MAPs to Success: Improving the First Year Experience of alternative entry mature age students

*University of Western Australia, Australia*

**Why?**

The University of Western Australia (UWA) is one of eight prestigious, research intensive institutions in Australia, with a high proportion of traditional school leavers. Until recently, their small (approximately 10%) cohort of mature students has gained admission through standard entry pathways.

Policy and sector drivers in Australia aim to increase the number of under-represented students in higher education. The authors note that mature age students face unique challenges, particularly when compounded with additional barriers such as low socio-economic status, no previous education experience or a disability. It can be particularly challenging entering a ‘Group of Eight’ university (37).

**What?**

In 2008, UWA introduced a non-traditional pathway for mature age students: Mature age Access Pathway (MAP), which evolved into the MAPs for Success Project in 2010. This offers students with no formal entry requirements the opportunity to study select degree programmes, with comprehensive pre- and post-enrolment support, designed to aid transition, enhance retention and reduce the ‘potential harm’ (personal or financial) that students can experience if unprepared for higher education (37).

Supported by a grant from the University’s Learning and Teaching Performance Fund, staff from across Student Support Services and Admissions designed a suite of events and activities to support transition to and through the first year. This includes pre-entry activities: an information session, mini lecture and short diagnostic assessment provide students (and supporting staff) with individual Learning Action Plans to guide enrolment choices. A full day ‘Study Essentials’ event facilitates peer networking and introduces university systems, support services and the development of core academic and study skills. In addition, MAP students are invited to attend a welcome event with other mature age students who have entered through traditional pathways.

During the semester, MAPs for Success incorporates academic, pastoral and administrative support. Students attend a one-on-one consultation early in the first semester and again if they fail any units in subsequent semesters. Optional one-on-one meetings are available in the second semester if required. Students are encouraged to attend an interview within the first five weeks to discuss any factors that could impact negatively on their success and ensure awareness of available support services. The authors note that this is highly resource intensive but effective, and can flag up individual issues at an early stage. In addition, students can access generic or MAP-specific study skills workshops, as well as individual consultations with staff.

Weekly social activities are arranged to facilitate peer networking for all students enrolled on first year units and there are two events per semester specifically for mature age students.

**Impact**

The authors note that there has been a steady increase in the number of MAP students admitted to UWA since 2008; since MAPs to Success launched in 2010 there have been fewer students withdrawing during their first semester and a higher number passing all units attempted. There has also been an upward trend in completion rates. The authors acknowledge that the increases are not statistically significant and are likely to be ‘more
incremental than dramatic’ but conclude that the project is successful in meeting its aims (p42). This is backed up by positive qualitative feedback.

*Transition Pedagogy – Mapping*

This project illustrates aspects of the Curriculum Principles and Strategies identified within Kift et al’s 3rd Generation Transition Pedagogy Conceptual Model*.

The authors describe a successful initiative at UWA, designed to enhance the diversity of students at the institution; specifically to increase the number of mature age students enrolling on degree programmes, progressing successfully and reducing any associated personal and financial risk.

MAPs to Success aims to aid student transition into and through the first year: support begins pre-entry and continues throughout the semester. A suite of activities that incorporate academic, administration and social elements is delivered by colleagues across the university, including Support Services and Admissions, evidencing academic-professional partnerships in practice. They aim to provide proactive and timely access to learning and life support at key point of transition. The authors note the importance of social networking for academic success and there are a range of opportunities for peer and social interaction within the programme (intentionally fostering a sense of belonging). In addition, staff-student interaction is encouraged through one-to-one meetings and workshops.

MAPs to Success has been designed to engage students in learning from the outset: diagnostic assessment is used to inform action planning and support, and students are encouraged to attend a range of skills workshops and sessions with peers.

Both quantitative and qualitative evaluation measures are used, including metrics such as enrolment, retention, completion and withdrawal rates. Likewise, qualitative feedback suggests that the approach is highly valued by students and is contributing to a positive and successful first year experience.

*Source*


Transition management case study: creating a transition tool box

School of Medical Sciences, University of Aberdeen, Scotland

Why?

College level data identified a high level of attrition for students in level three of their studies in the School of Medical Sciences at the University of Aberdeen; in 2009/10, as many as 13% of the cohort were listed as discontinued. A number of possible reasons were identified, including: increased workload and expectations; changes to assessment styles; pressure to enhance portfolios with extra-curricular activities and diverse student support needs.

Student retention is a key priority area for most institutions and is viewed as one measure of the student experience. Given an increasingly diverse student body, the author notes that one single retention strategy is unlikely to be enough; timely and proactive support must be offered in a way that meets a wide range of student needs.

What?

The need for ongoing support was highlighted as a potential solution to this problem; if students were encouraged to report issues early, through a variety of means, they may not become barriers to success in level three.

A series of strategies to enhance transition and progression through level three was designed with the aim of providing sustained support and guidance for a diverse student population. This ‘transition tool box’, encompassing strategy, description, rationale and measures of engagement, aims to inform students of challenges and highlight opportunities to facilitate engagement, development and success. Opportunities outlined in the toolbox include: a ‘welcome to level 3’ event; weekly drop-in sessions; virtual learning environment (VLE) sites and tailored announcements; support and information from previous level three students and a careers conference.

The school aimed to ensure effective communication at course level to identify early signs of possible student ‘disengagement’ (e.g. poor attendance, failure to submit assignments and low assessment grades) to enable early intervention. An ‘advice bank’ was produced for students, drawing on findings from a survey of academic staff into their own experiences of level three study at undergraduate level and offering tips for success. Channels of communication were made available for students to seek advice, guidance and support.

Impact

The author notes that the VLE was utilised widely by students both as a communication tool and repository of information in relation to the tool box and level three transition support. Evaluation of the tool box indicates year-on-year improvement in student retention; the author highlights a ten-fold reduction in student attrition across three academic years. Student engagement with the strategies designed within the tool box is high: for example, 75-80% of level three students have attended a welcome event and around 300 students attend drop-in sessions each semester.

It is noted that although taking this approach is resource intensive, the final produce/resource is highly flexible and could be tailored for use with a wider student cohort.
Transition pedagogy – mapping

This intervention illustrates aspects of the Curriculum Principles and Strategies identified within Kift et al’s (2010) 3rd Generation Transition Pedagogy Conceptual Model*. The author describes a variety of strategies designed carefully to engage students and support transition to and through level three of undergraduate study. A range of opportunities are offered to students, with clearly mapped rationale and engagement measures. This includes online and face-to-face activities and opportunities for student interaction with academics, professional staff, employers and peers. A school careers conference evidences academic-professional partnerships in practice.

The author describes a range of drivers for implementing this approach, including high levels of withdrawal resulting from academic issues, pressure to engage in co-curricular activities and diversity of support needs – all of which can contribute to stress-related health issues. The interventions, therefore, aim to provide proactive and timely access to learning and life support at a key point of transition, and to reignite a sense of belonging within the school. Innovative approaches are taken, including engaging more senior students and academic staff to describe their approaches to success in level three, and introducing a ‘welcome to level 3’ event to make explicit the challenges, opportunities and support available throughout the year.

A number of evaluation measures are used, including metrics such as engagement with the VLE and student retention figures, which the author notes have improved year-on-year since the implementation of the tool box. Likewise, qualitative feedback suggests that the approaches have been well received. The author suggests that this resource could be adapted and utilised across the institution or more widely to support and manage key student transitions.

Source


Biomedical research, employability and enterprise skills: preparing students for their final year and beyond

*University of Bristol, England*

**Why?**

Feedback from employers, as reflected in the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) survey in 2011, suggests that some graduate applicants still lack key employability skills, despite this being a significant factor in graduate recruitment.

The authors note that although STEM graduates are favoured in business, the typical higher education STEM curriculum does not set out to develop students’ self-management, team working or business and customer awareness skills.

**What?**

In response to this, the University of Bristol has developed a mandatory, credit-bearing, second year unit for biomedical science students: Biomedical Research, Employability and Enterprise Skills (BREES). The unit has three main strands: training in Research, Employability and Enterprise skills. The aim is to support students to develop employability skills as highlighted by the CBI, as well as core academic skills needed for the final year of study, which includes a substantial research project. BREES aims to prepare students for life after graduation; it also provides careers training early in the second year while some students are applying for industry placements.

The unit runs throughout the academic year with one lecture per week to provide guidance and context. In designing BREES, the team incorporated several group tasks to allow students to develop team working skills which, evidence suggests, are best developed through experiential learning. Students complete individual and team-based coursework tasks and examinations. Research accounts for 60% of the unit marks and Enterprise and Employability 20% each. The Enterprise strand of the unit was developed in collaboration with the University's Research and Enterprise Development Unit; the Employability strand in collaboration with the University Careers Service.

The team aimed to involve students actively in devising assessments that would be sustainable and encourage reflection. Formative examples and opportunities to practice are incorporated into the unit’s design.

**Impact**

Despite relatively critical student feedback – obtained through discussion with class representatives and unit evaluation questionnaires – the authors note that student attainment on the unit was high. Whilst they acknowledge challenges in delivering, assessing and providing feedback to students on such a complex unit, they conclude that it has allowed students to develop skills which facilitate their transition to the final year of study, into industry placements and life after graduation. In moving forward, they note the importance of continuing to work collaboratively with students, responding to their feedback and making changes to the design and delivery of the unit as required.

**Transition Pedagogy – Mapping**

This unit illustrates aspects of the Curriculum Principles and Strategies identified within Kift et al’s 3rd Generation Transition Pedagogy Conceptual Model.

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**In**  Subject focussed  **Out**  Generic

---

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**Transition Pedagogy – Mapping**

This unit illustrates aspects of the Curriculum Principles and Strategies identified within Kift et al’s 3rd Generation Transition Pedagogy Conceptual Model.
BREES is a core level two unit, aimed at developing students’ graduate attributes – in particular research, enterprise and employability skills. It supports students as they make the transition through university (in preparation for a large research project) and in preparation for the transition to placement or employment.

Academics, students and other university services (e.g. Careers) collaborated on the design of the unit (academic-professional partnerships), which features a range of activities to promote engagement in learning. Students participate in a number of group activities, designed to foster the development of team-working skills. The unit incorporates active learning, e.g. students participate in mock interviews, taking on both the role of panel member and interviewee. This facilitates both peer interaction and interaction with postgraduate students/post-doctoral fellows who support the activity.

Students were involved in the design of assessment, which is scaffolded throughout the unit with formative examples and opportunities to practice built in. The unit includes formative and summative assessment, generic cohort feedback and peer feedback. Students are empowered to moderate individual team member’s marks as part of a group activity, with arbitration from staff if required.

The authors note the importance of being responsive to student evaluation of the unit. Whilst attainment was high after the first year of delivery, student feedback was relatively critical. The team worked with class representatives to identify problematic areas (e.g. the scheduling of some sessions) and made changes for the next academic session. In moving forward, the intention is to meet with class representatives throughout the academic session to deal proactively with problems as they arise. Overall, the authors conclude that BREES has provided students with opportunities to develop skills which facilitate their transition to their final year, to industry placements and to life after graduation.

Source


Practicing politics: Student engagement and enthusiasm

University College Cork, Ireland

Why?
Ireland entered a ‘deep and prolonged recession’ in 2008, engendering significant public debate about political reform (340). Academics at University College Cork sought to develop two innovative approaches, based on active and participatory learning, to engage undergraduate political science students with this national debate. This is in contrast with more traditional approaches, such as lectures and seminars, which are often viewed as the ‘signature pedagogy’ of political science degrees (342).

What?
Two projects were designed and advertised to all students undertaking an undergraduate political science module at University College Cork (approximately 1,000). They were promoted widely in class, through the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), on the department website and via posters. The first project, ‘Engagement with Purpose’, was funded by the University’s Teaching and Learning Centre and involved training and supporting students to participate in a full parliamentary committee meeting held in the university in November 2009. Participating students attended workshops in policy research, writing, and presentation skills, delivered by academics and external experts. They were supported individually to develop and refine their ideas before contributing verbally, and in writing, to a public debate on the use of the voting system PR-STV. This was attended by MPs, parliamentary clerks and ushers, local councillors and members of the public. It was covered by local and national media and made available on the national parliament website.

The second project, ‘Government and Politics Review’, was funded by the National Academy for Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning (NAIRTL) and involved students working with staff to create an online undergraduate academic journal of research. It was produced and edited by staff, students and the Government and Politics Society. The theme of the first edition was political reform; submissions for both articles and posters were accepted, following peer and staff review. Students were supported to be writers, researchers and reviewers: workshops were offered on research skills, peer review, academic writing, poster design and publication. A political reform conference was organised to launch the journal, attended by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and notable academics in the field. Again, the event attracted significant local and national media coverage.

Impact
The authors note that both projects produced a number of key deliverables, including an online journal, conference proceedings, report from the parliamentary committee and media coverage. To evaluate ‘Engagement with Purpose’, staff and students were asked to complete feedback questionnaires; both provided very positive feedback. All students agreed that they were ‘more likely’ to participate in future political events, although they were divided in terms of how much taking part in the project would enhance their future academic performance (p348). Likewise, staff and student feedback for the ‘Government and Politics Review’ project was very positive. All participating students agreed that they were ‘more likely’ to take part in future research and writing activities and the majority felt that participation in the project would contribute greatly to their academic performance (348-9).

Whilst staff and student feedback was very positive, the authors do note that student engagement with the projects was lower than they would have hoped. For ‘Engagement with Purpose’, 20 students attended training workshops and, of these, eight presented and submitted to the parliamentary committee. Sixteen students participated in ‘Government and Politics Review’. The authors suggest that further research is needed to explore why the majority of students did not participate in these innovative active learning projects.
Transition Pedagogy – Mapping

These projects illustrate aspects of the Curriculum Principles and Strategies identified within Kift et al’s 3rd Generation Transition Pedagogy Conceptual Model.

Both projects were designed specifically to engage students in their learning and in broader national political debate. They centred on active learning approaches, deliberately moving away from the traditional pedagogy of lectures and workshops. They were carefully scaffolded; students were trained and supported to develop their ideas, skills and confidence before being empowered to present them, either at a parliamentary committee meeting or in an online research journal. They centred on collaboration, in particular staff-student and peer-peer interaction.

Workshops were delivered by academics and external experts, an example of academic-professional partnerships in practice. Likewise, both projects sought to engage academics, students, members of public and government officials.

‘Government and Politics Review’ had an explicit aim to foster students’ sense of belonging with the research culture of the academic department and it was decided to accept both journals and academic posters to enable more students to participate (recognising a diversity of ability within the student cohort). Students were encouraged to adapt module-based research for the journal, aligning the project closely with the curriculum.

The authors evaluate and reflect upon the impact of the projects, acknowledging that whilst very successful in terms of student and staff experience, further research is needed in terms of why uptake was lower than hoped, and how to engage more students in innovative action-based learning.

Source


Skills for professional practice for biosciences 2: 
A cross-disciplinary approach to student transition

Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU), Scotland

Why?
The Department of Life Sciences at Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) offers a suite of full-time, year-long MSc programmes, comprising predominantly international students from diverse cultural and educational backgrounds. On entry, some students lack the pre-requisite academic skills needed to perform well on their programme; all students, therefore, undertake a core Skills for Professional Practice for Biosciences 1 (SPPB1) module at the beginning of the programme to ensure they have the skill-set needed to succeed.

In a highly competitive labour market, graduates also need to demonstrate a wider range of skills, abilities and attributes in addition to academic achievement. However, feedback from employers suggests that some graduates lack the ‘softer’ skills needed to be work ready, including within the Life Sciences sector.

What?
Working in collaboration with the University Careers Service, the Department of Life Sciences developed a second module, Skills for Professional Practice for Biosciences 2 (SPPB2), with a focus on professional career advancement. The aim of this core module is to encourage students to start thinking about their professional career development at an early stage, planning for this and developing tools to allow them to move forward. It uses an innovative mix of learning and personal development, draws on theory and practice and embeds GCU’s five key graduate attributes throughout (Discipline knowledge and application; Communication Skills; Learning, Research and Enquiry; Creativity, Confidence and Enterprise; and Citizenship).

The module is designed to prepare students for life after graduation and the ‘ever changing environment’ of employment (4). Personal Development Planning (PDP) is a key feature of the curriculum, allowing students to reflect on their skills, consider how best to showcase them to employers and plan for life after graduation. Students are encouraged to view learning and career planning as lifelong activities, developing resilience and self-awareness.

Students produce a reflective blog over a ten week period to reflect upon progress, evaluate personal development, identify actions and obtain peer support. They also create personal online profiles which can be used as part of their CV or online networking activities.

A range of teaching methods and resources are used to deliver the SPPB2 module; this includes a combination of tutor-led, peer support, and collaborative group work. Classroom activities, online exercises and student-directed learning are also employed. In addition, students are coached in career development and employability skills, including job searching, networking and the application process.

Impact
The authors acknowledge that student engagement is a key challenge; some students resist dedicating time to non-subject specific modules. However, feedback suggests that students who undertake this module benefit in a range of ways. Peer support aids the transition to Master’s level study and students are better able to recognise, and understand the value of, their own skills and abilities. As such, they are better equipped to make the transition to, and succeed in, the global labour market.
**Transition pedagogy – mapping**

This module illustrates aspects of the Curriculum Principles and Strategies identified within Kift et al’s 3rd Generation Transition Pedagogy Conceptual Model*.

The SPPB2 module was developed in response to the academic and skills needs of a diverse, international student cohort. Key to its design is supporting students to develop and recognise the softer skills needed to transition successfully to the global workplace after university. It utilises a range of approaches and methods to encourage student engagement, including tutor-led sessions, peer support, group PDP, collaborative group-work and online exercises. It aims to engage students in the ‘basics’ alongside subject-specific modules. A range of assessment and feedback methods are used, including peer feedback within career development exercises.

The module takes a holistic approach to student development, enabling students to cope with change and different situations ahead of a key point of transition (proactive and timely access to learning and life support). It is an example of sustainable academic-professional partnerships, having been developed jointly by academic staff and careers advisors.

Through student feedback and evaluation, the authors have identified a range of benefits for participating students. In addition, they note that traditional – i.e. individual – PDP sessions were time-consuming and insular for students and staff; this was therefore changed to a more engaging group format. Feedback from students suggests that the module encourages collaboration and joined-up working, strengthens peer networks and provides a platform for open discussion (fostering a sense of belonging with the cohort and institution).

**Sources**


Relational pedagogy for student engagement and success at university
Murdoch University, Australia

Why?
This case study summarizes findings from a small research study into experiences of undergraduate students from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds and the importance and impact of their relationships with tutors and lecturers to support and increase their engagement through higher education study. The study is investigated through the lens of a relational pedagogy as developed by Sidorkin (2002), and to what extent the education of students is centred on them building relationships with academics. The context to which this research was conducted was the policy objective set out by the Australian Government to increase participation in higher education by students from low SES by 2020.

What?
The 16 students who participated in the study were ‘non-traditional’ students who had progressed to degree study via undertaking an access or enabling programme at an Australian university. They were older students in either second or third year of their programme studying a number of different subjects – teaching, sociology, commerce, history and engineering. Researchers were academic staff based in the university. Discussions with the cohort of students were intended to be open-ended and exploratory, adopting a ‘purposeful conversations’ framework. The key themes explored with students were ‘…their experiences of schooling, on the attitudes of family and friends to their decision to return to study, and on their experiences of studying at university’ (485).

Impact
The findings highlighted that academics who engaged with a relational pedagogy approach, influenced students’ learning. The more enriching the interaction of students with academics was, the more positive impact it had on their continuing engagement with university and vice versa. The evidence also showed that not all tutor-student relationships are positive as institutional practices, curriculum design and tutors’ attitudes may act as barriers to successful interaction. As the authors note: ‘While every form of human interaction is relational, not all relationships are mutually beneficial’ (489).

Academics who were proactive in encouraging interaction and understood their students’ backgrounds, identities and motivational factors positively influenced students’ learning. Similarly, students who also encouraged tutor relationships had a beneficial learning experience.

The picture of the impact of the tutor-student relationship emphasises the importance of institutional buy-in to a relational pedagogy. If successfully woven into the Australian higher education curriculum, this approach could enhance student engagement. The relational aspects of learning, teaching and assessment should also be considered. The authors suggest that the findings and associated issues, positive and negative, should be considered by national policy-makers and practitioners to further improve participation in higher education from under-represented students.

Transition Pedagogy – Mapping
This research study illustrates aspects of the Curriculum Principles and Strategies identified within Kift et al’s (2010) 3rd Generation Transition Pedagogy Conceptual Model.
A clear message from the findings was the importance of students’ engagement with academics to enhance their transition experience. The research participants, linked to the policy drivers at a national level in Australian higher education to increase access to university for disadvantaged groups, focused on non-traditional students, emphasising the important principle of diversity.

Evidence from the research showed that a relational pedagogic strategy within design of the curriculum assists student development. A curriculum that engages students in learning by promoting and building positive relationships via the development of tutor-student interactions emerged from the study. In particular there was a strong message that academics who interact with their students play a key role in student learning and engagement. Moreover evidence showed that positive relationships with academics made students feel they belonged at the institution. Positive views were espoused by some students about the importance of feedback which demonstrates a key component of the assessment principle however it should be noted that the research also showed concerns from other students about the amount of feedback they received from tutors on their work.

Sources


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