

Managing Effective Transition Experiences for Direct Entry and 'Top-Up' Honours Degree Students

**Update for University Development Project
Meeting**

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Dr Sue Cuthbert (Head of Collaborative Programmes)

Project Rationale, Aim and Objectives

1. Rationale:

- a) **Achievement:** Direct Entry (DE) students less likely to achieve 'good' Honours degree than First Degree entrants (FDE) (48% DE compared with 61% FDE in 2015-16; attainment gap is 13%)
- b) **Transition experience:** Sector research – experiences prior to and at key transition points impact on student experience with consequences for student satisfaction, progression, retention and achievement (e.g. French, Kempson and Kendal, 2015; QAA Scotland Enhancement Theme 'Student Transitions' 2014-17, Thomas, 2012)
- c) **Student satisfaction:** Improving transition experience and potential to improve student retention and achievement

2. Aim: To establish a University approach to managing effective transition experiences for direct entry students progressing to 'Top-Up'/Honours degrees (at L5 and L6)

3. Objectives:

- i. Engage staff and students (UW and partners) in identifying potential challenges, barriers to, and opportunities for enhancement of direct entry students' transition experiences
- ii. Identify examples of effective and innovative practice in managing and supporting direct entry students' transition experiences
- iii. Create good practice 'tool kit'/guidance to engage course teams and students in practical strategies and approaches to enable successful transitions

The transition experience.....

It is the human side of higher education that comes first – finding friends, feeling confident and, above all, feeling a part of your course of study and the institution – that is the necessary starting point for academic success (Thomas, 2012)

What Works?1 (Student Retention & Success programme) report: [Building student engagement and belonging in higher education at a time of change \(Thomas 2012\)](#)

If this is a necessary starting point for success, Direct Entry/Top-Up students may be at an even greater disadvantage if the experience of transition involves:

- entering a 'new'/different course
- entering the course at a different point to 'everyone else'
- new place of study
- with new staff
- new group of students/peers, and
- new 'systems'
- risk of being 'invisible in the system'

(one or any combination of these)

Factors that may challenge/impede transition experience for direct entry students – Key Themes

Themes	Challenges/Issues
Environment	new location, classrooms, different sites, travel
Social	peer support, new peers, need for friendships, larger groups, relationships with tutors
Academic challenge	perceived gap (by students and L6 staff), academic skills
Learning experiences	making choices, 'independent' learning, inconsistency in learning, teaching, and assessment styles
Academic practices	academic writing, feedback, L&T and assessment methods, different VLE
Support	change in personal tutor and approach to PAT, supportive 'Top-Up' staff that value HN/FD, IS supervision, disability support may change from HE in FE to University HE
Communication	larger/different teaching team, information prior to transition
Expectations	'independent learning', transition to Hons a 'greater jump/leap', 'will I cope?'
Student Self-Efficacy (Social and Academic), Emotional, Resilience	belief in ones' ability to achieve desired results, maintaining a positive outlook and developing skills, e.g. goal setting
Practical	systems, processes e.g. different VLE, module selection, student-led timetabling, timing of IS topic/proposal, electronic assignment submission, differences in design and structure of delivery at L6 (e.g. FDs 'day-release' from work)

Improving DE students' transition experience: What Works?

Early identification of DE students and meeting with PAT

Early information and support for DE entry students in making choices e.g. progression routes, module selection clinics, access to L6 content, IS preparation, placements

Positive and productive staff relationships between HND/FD and Top-Up/Hons Degree team; University and Partner

Effective link tutor visits to partners, with **scheduled transition progression talks**

Use existing top up/L6 students to meet with potential top up students at level 5

Visits of partner staff and students to the University

Two day Summer School (July/early Sept) (IoE) to help students with IS proposals

Bridging sessions and on-line tasks to familiarise students

Use of Yammer/Facebook groups - form professional network for DE students as part of induction experience both pre-course and on starting the course

Bespoke Induction programme and academic skills development for DE students (mandatory sessions for the 'top-up'/L6 courses?)

Dedicated 'top-up' personal tutors (PAT) or designated liaison tutors and **PAT Guidance**

Buddy System/Peer-to-peer mentoring (ISES SAP project)

Curriculum alignment in course development, includes L, T&A strategies as well as subject content and skills.

Outcomes to date...and Next Steps

1. Current intelligence:

- Project group experience
- Existing UW projects (e.g. ISES SAP)
- Sector research

2. Posted initial findings on 'Realising Teaching Excellence Blog'

3. 'Informal' Audit of 'Top-Up' Course Leaders practice related to DE students' transition experience and suggestions for improvement

Next Steps:

1. **Cross-Institute/course focus groups with direct entry/Top-Up students** to establish student perspectives and validate assumptions about needs, potential challenges and solutions (requires ethics approval)
2. **Meeting(s) with relevant Top-Up Degree/Hons degree course leaders** to share effective practice and identify areas for development/practical implementation of chosen strategies
3. **Publish 'Talking Heads'** of effective practice examples for course teams – if so, where?
4. **Create Toolkit** for staff in managing DE student transition experience, e.g. checklist for L6 PATs for DE student
5. **Evaluate** impact?