

## Context

The Sutton Trust recently conducted a poll to assess the impact of the COVID-19 on higher education and university transition, surveying 511 current university applicants and 895 current university students. [Their findings make for interesting reading](#).<sup>1</sup> Key points are as follows:

- Heightened anxiety: 48% of respondents believed that COVID-19 will have a negative impact on their chances of getting into their first-choice university
- Working-class applicants are more worried about this impact than their middle-class peers
- Almost a fifth of those surveyed admitted having changed their minds about their next year university attendance (either by taking a gap year or changing their 1<sup>st</sup> choice)
  - From this group, working-class students were more likely to have changed their minds; the Sutton Trust feeling is that working class students are generally much more likely – for financial reasons - to pick a neighbouring university and remain living at home.

There are a couple of other unique points we might consider. For the first time, students considering University will be joining from a period of flux and will not have been engaged within a structured educational environment for the 6 months leading to September. For those entering from A Level courses, there may well be some anxieties around the use of predicted grades for entry and the fact that they have not had to ‘prove themselves’ through normal examination routes.

This all combines to mean that early engagement must be a priority to ensure that all students are engaged with the University – and their peers – quickly and effectively, despite the potential restrictions that will be in place which potentially limit normal opportunities for induction and orientation. We must also focus on developing digital capabilities; it cannot be assumed that new students have the confidence, skills and understanding to effectively make use of either the relevant technologies or learning effectively online.

## Approaches

JISC have produced a very [useful resource](#)<sup>2</sup> focusing on planning induction for students in 2020 in the light of this context and aiming to answer the key question:

*“How can you engage your learners and students and embed a sense of belonging so they feel part of the institution? What should you consider?”*

The resource links to real practical examples of induction activity and is designed to help you develop your programme, whether your students are arriving on campus, learning from home or blending the two.

The UW TEL Team are planning to produce a short video for students explaining the basics of getting online at the University. The current situation not only puts digital capabilities at the forefront of learning, but also provides great opportunities to explore a wider range of engagement activities using technologies. These links provide some further interesting and helpful reading on the subject:

*Inside Digital Learning* asked four authors of books about online education for their expert advice on how instructors and their institutions can excel in virtual course instruction: <https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/article/2017/07/12/7-guidelines-effective-teaching-online>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://premieradvisory.co.uk/2020/05/15/what-impact-does-covid-19-have-on-transition-to-university/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/full-guide/planning-induction-for-autumn-2020>

Tips for students to help them to learn successfully from online lectures

<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/student/advice/tips-studying-online-and-home-university-students>

Guidance from the OU for students on developing study skills for online learning

<https://help.open.ac.uk/browse/computing/study-skills-for-online-learning>

The University of Edinburgh's Ultimate Guide to Online Learning, combining a selection of myth-busting blogs into one (searchable) article. <https://www.ed.ac.uk/medicine-vet-medicine/postgraduate/postgraduate-life/postgraduate-blog/ultimate-guide-online-learning>

A clear and accessible guide, also from Edinburgh, to support students undertaking hybrid learning <https://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development/study-hub/learning-resources/hybrid-learning-and-teaching>

With all this in mind, it is interesting to note that Imperial College have taken the approach of outlining expectations in relation to [remote learning](#). This forms one aspect of their '[success guide](#)', which puts a positive spin on the current situation.

### **What are the issues – and what works?**

Thomas, writing in 2011<sup>3</sup>, identified that pre-entry interventions were beneficial to transitioning students in the following ways:

- a) providing information, knowledge and skills to improve pre-entry decision making and retention;
- b) developing expectations and academic preparation pre-entry to enhance transition, retention and success;
- c) fostering early engagement to promote integration and social capital.

Our Transitions Project in 2019<sup>4</sup>, centred on similar ideas and produced a variety of case studies. Key outcomes are appended below – the full report can be accessed [here](#).

Similarly, Sue Cuthbert's work on managing effective transitions for Top-Up awards and direct entrants covers a range of themes which are introduced and discussed [here](#)<sup>5</sup>. The full report on the findings is available [here](#)<sup>6</sup> (.pdf).

Susanna Prankel and Lorraine Weaver from the School of Science and the Environment wrote about the issues of transitioning directly into Level 6 in their 2012 paper.<sup>7</sup> They found the sharing of academic expectations, critical thinking exercises and collaboration on grading criteria to be most effective at helping students engage with L&T.

There are, of course, useful pages across the University website about transitions too – including from Library Services.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/building-student-engagement-and-belonging-higher-education-time-change-final-report>

<sup>4</sup> <https://rteworcester.wordpress.com/2019/08/30/student-transitions-project-report/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://rteworcester.wp.worc.ac.uk/index.php/2017/05/15/managing-effective-transition-experiences-for-direct-entry-and-top-up-students/>

<sup>6</sup> [https://rteworcester.files.wordpress.com/2019/07/improving-direct-entry-student-experience-of-transition-to-top-up\\_honours-degree.pdf](https://rteworcester.files.wordpress.com/2019/07/improving-direct-entry-student-experience-of-transition-to-top-up_honours-degree.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.11120/beej.2012.20000092>

<sup>8</sup> <https://library.worc.ac.uk/guides/preparing-for-university>

## University of Worcester engagement with students holding offers

Access to our offer holders is currently available through:

- a collective applicant site on Blackboard (upon which students can self-enrol);
- discussions with Comms & Participation and access to their Maximiser database;
- direct contact with applicants.

Work is continuing to explore and develop specific course Blackboard sites which will enable more direct communications and pre-entry engagement exercises with applicants.

Using these approaches some staff are already planning/running the following:

- 'welcome videos' giving them more info about what to expect, how things are going to run and that we are here to help and answer questions;
- Peer mentoring is in operation in Psychology, including with current applicants who have already accepted places;
- Psychology staff are also using BB site for the same group;
- Drama have run some online physical theatre workshops for L7 and offer holders;
- Politics/History have been running some online lectures open to all (which may have included invites to offer holders).

If you are also working with prospective students/offer holders, let us know and we'll add it to the [Realising Teaching Excellence](#) blog so that others can learn from this and benefit themselves!

### Engagement with new/returning students in Semester 1

The RTE blog contains a range of interesting practices aimed at engaging students early and creating a strong sense of cohort identity:

- Setting up student 'mentors' or buddies to support the new L4 students (or L6 direct entrants) – see [here](#) for more info.
- Consider weekly assessment towards building a portfolio - see [here](#) for more info – this might be especially beneficial to those coming from BTEC backgrounds as it is similar to the coursework approach and can reduce the anxiety of a large looming assignment by breaking it down into smaller chunks. It can be combined with shared peer learning.
- Similarly, weekly directed study tasks can be uploaded onto Collaborate or through OneNote, as in [this case study](#). Feedback was provided on formative work through the same route, with the aim of extending learning from the lectures and providing clear links to summative assessments in the form of appendices or reflections based upon reflective models. Tutorials were also structured around the OneNote feedback to enable focused and relevant discussions that linked clearly to the module outcomes and summative assessments allowing students to see the connectivity and relevance of the formative assessment.

We have also spoken to a selection of staff across the University about activities they plan to undertake at the beginning of Semester 1. Here are just a brief example of some of the planned activities – again, please use the reply feature to add your plans or other thoughts:

- Virtual workshops via Collaborate are being held in Forensic Biology, where the module is split into smaller groups (perhaps for induction week and then at set times after) to discuss concerns and explore where additional support might be needed.
- Forensic Biologists are also building in 'demo' videos for BB that will replicate some of the practical elements that may not be able to be run normally during Semester 1.

- Alongside 'normal' induction events in WBS, staff are introducing the 'gameification' of Welcome Week – potentially across all undergraduate levels - to create group cohesion across the School. This can be engaged with virtually or in 'real space' – or through a blended combination.

*[Appendix follows]*

## **Developing Institutional Good Practice in Transitions' Support through Pre-entry, Induction and Learning Support Activities**

The first phase of the project was completed in May 2019 and a report presented at the July LTSEC (the full report is available on the 'O' Drive in the All Staff Documents area, LTSEC section of 'committee papers', 2018-19, 2019-07-08).

The key messages were as follows:

- i. The integration of the social and academic elements of university life is key to the integration of students into the Course, School and wider University community.
- ii. The early communication of key systems and structures upon students by staff is crucial in providing students with a sense of continuity and purpose.
- iii. Course teams and student groups working collaboratively on academic tasks helps develop a strong course identity and creates invaluable support structures for students.

### **Implications**

- Acceptance of the idea that social and academic integration are reliant upon each other in order to be most effective, affords the opportunity for wide-ranging, institutional strategies for UW's strategic approach to improving its retention.
- The role played by academic staff in course teams in developing this approach is essential. Academic staff can provide students with the necessary academic structures in which this social interaction is facilitated.
- The adoption of collaborative or group approach to learning may require some reorganisation of the learning environment, including changes in pedagogical practice, assessment and student supervision. This will necessarily require School and Institutional support.

Below are some approaches to integration/transition that have been used within the University and the sector in recent years.

## 2.1 Internal and External Resources for Course Teams

Element of Support	UW Tried and Tested	External Supporting Ideas/Resources
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>SOCIAL INTEGRATION</b></p>	<p><b>Course Induction initiative (SoE):</b> In response to students evaluating feelings of being ‘overwhelmed’ with information and having too much input we altered the programme to include more social spaces and make fewer demands of students in respect of task requirements during induction week, whilst remaining visible and offering opportunities for participation of varying kinds.</p> <p>Further details can be accessed here: <a href="#">link</a></p>	<p>This Birmingham City University initiative focuses on the social and pastoral elements of the first year experience. The approach weaves both SU and academic inputs through the transition into and through the first year experience: <a href="https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/srs_birmingham_city_vs2_0.pdf">https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/srs_birmingham_city_vs2_0.pdf</a></p>
	<p><b>Course ‘Summer School’ (SoE):</b> Development of a 2 day programme to better meet the needs of students. Programme included following content:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expectations of students and staff</li> <li>• Wellbeing / time management</li> <li>• Imposter syndrome (you deserve to be here)</li> <li>• Intro to Blackboard, SOLE and other technology</li> <li>• Intro to Harvard Referencing</li> <li>• Using the library and library services – delivered by academic librarian</li> <li>• Critical reading – how to read effectively, take notes</li> <li>• Academic writing – optional writing practice task and feedback opportunity</li> </ul> <p>Further details can be accessed here: <a href="#">link</a></p>	
Element of Support	UW Tried and Tested	Supporting/Ideas Resources
		<p>Bucks New University ‘Project Right Fit’ looks to engage students pre-enrolment, it explores what information students really need:</p>

<b>ORIENTATION</b>		<a href="http://www.studentengagement.ac.uk/newsite/index.php/react/projects/bucks-new-university/project-rightfit">http://www.studentengagement.ac.uk/newsite/index.php/react/projects/bucks-new-university/project-rightfit</a>
		University of Brighton – ‘Hit the Ground Running’ a project to support the initial transition to HE: <a href="http://blogs.brighton.ac.uk/elearningteam/2017/01/16/case-study-pre-entry-module-hit-the-ground-running/">http://blogs.brighton.ac.uk/elearningteam/2017/01/16/case-study-pre-entry-module-hit-the-ground-running/</a>
		Birmingham City University (BCU) run ‘Level up’ to help students make the transition into HE: <a href="https://www.bcu.ac.uk/media/applying-to-us/level-up">https://www.bcu.ac.uk/media/applying-to-us/level-up</a>

Element of Support	UW Tried and Tested	Supporting Ideas/ Resources
<b>PREPARATION FOR LEARNING</b>	Webpages to help Students understand the academic skills they will need at university: <a href="https://library.worc.ac.uk/guides/preparing-for-university">https://library.worc.ac.uk/guides/preparing-for-university</a>	
	<b>Course initiative (SoE):</b> Feedback initiative Focused on revised practice for the release of grades in order to create a more supportive an environment for our students. Initiative also increased student engagement and satisfaction with the assignment feedback process. Further details can be accessed here: <a href="#">link</a>	
	<b>Module initiative (SoSES):</b> This initiative was designed to increase student attendance and, in so doing, to increase engagement and achievement.  Further details can be accessed here: <a href="#">link</a>	
	<b>Module Initiative (SoE):</b>	

	<p>This initiative had 3 aims:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To encourage engagement with weekly set reading</li> <li>2. To enable all students to engage at the most appropriate level for them.</li> <li>3. To model effective teaching and learning and gauge student understanding in order to adapt planning</li> </ol> <p>Further details can be accessed here: <a href="#">link</a></p>	
	<p><b>Module and/or Course initiative (SoE)</b></p> <p>This initiative sought to increase student engagement with resource lists and addresses the need to for students to read more widely in their preparation for summative assignments.</p> <p>Further details can be accessed here: <a href="#">link</a></p>	

*NB We are conscious that there are likely to be many more internal examples of excellent transition practice and we urge Schools to encourage staff to document their initiatives so that this column can significantly grow.*

## 2.2 Possible Activities for Course Teams to consider when planning for the Student Transition Experience

### Transition Phase 1: Student Preparedness, Welcome and Entry

Element of Support	Activities
<b>Social Integration</b>	Send welcome email from CL and course team
	Set up social media platform to open up informal communication between students and staff
	Create peer to peer buddy/mentor scheme with 2 <sup>nd</sup> /3 <sup>rd</sup> year students

Element of Support	Activities
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<b>Orientation</b>	Send course specific information and details about what students can expect on arrival
	Alert students to any events for specific groups of students
	Communicate your expectations re: attendance and engagement
	Do you have any podcasts/videos you could send so that students can see their new surroundings in advance
	Let students know in advance, If possible, who their PAT is/ how they can make contact with him/her
	Alert students to any careers/employability opportunities related to your subject area

Element of Support	Activities
<b>Preparation for Learning</b>	What are the most useful, pre-arrival, learning tasks you might you set?
	Communicate your principles and strategy for learning, teaching and assessment
	What are the skills students would find most useful to practice to prepare them for first weeks of classes?
	Is there a single key text (rather than a reading list) you would want students to read before start of semester 1

**Transition Phase 2: Induction and belonging within an Inclusive Learning Community**

Element of Support	Activities
<b>Social Integration</b>	Set up early face to face meeting with course team – organised activities tend to be less intimidating than ‘meet and greet’, networking events
	Course based group activity which introduces students to the subject and starts course bonding process
	Welcome week is ideal time to launch peer mentoring /buddy groups
	Highlight opportunities that exist across University for students to meet new people
	Signpost services for people who will perhaps take longer to develop relationships and struggle to feel they ‘belong’

Element of Support	Activities
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<b>Orientation</b>	Create a programme of information, which is time sensitive, so students only receive information on a 'need to know' basis. 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> year could identify the information a new student needs, the best way to communicate it and access it etc.
	Create an orientation video, which new students can review on their own, at a later date (this is something perhaps 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> year students could help create?)
	Limit number of 'passive' presentations to a minimum
	Communicate requirements for specific groups of students (international)
	Introduce Students to their PATs
	Campus/City tour – led by 2 <sup>nd</sup> /3 <sup>rd</sup> year students with course team in attendance – ideal opportunity to reinforce message about how they stay safe, look after each other, ensure they always stay in groups when returning from a night out

<b>Element of Support</b>	<b>Activities</b>
<b>Preparation for Learning</b>	Induct students to learning in your subject
	Introduce students to the new vocabulary they need to know and understand e.g. formative assessment; its meaning, its value and its relationship to summative assessment
	Offer guidance about how students can make best use of 'out of class' time
	Talk to students about the University's attendance policy, not just the importance of regular attendance/engagement, but about early communication with us (e.g. PAT, CL, ML, peer mentor/buddy) about reason for absence etc. or any other reasons which are affecting progress on the course
	Introduce students to the learning support you offer and which is supplemented elsewhere in the University

**Transition Phase 3: Support for Student Learning and Progression**

Element of Support	Activities
<b>Academic and Social integration</b>	Use the Library Services Learner Journey toolkit to embed study skills into your curriculum: <a href="https://library.worc.ac.uk/services/academic-staff-support/library-teaching">https://library.worc.ac.uk/services/academic-staff-support/library-teaching</a> .  Speak to your Academic Liaison Librarian to develop appropriate sessions: <a href="https://library.worc.ac.uk/help/contact">https://library.worc.ac.uk/help/contact</a>