

## Appendix 3: Blended learning – priorities and goal setting for different levels of study

This paper articulates how blended learning approaches can support students at different stages in their educational journey. It is based on theory and research regarding the relative importance of different learning needs at different levels of study. Whilst there is a degree of uniformity of these across different subject areas and amongst different groups of students, it is acknowledged that this will be influenced by the nature of the study body and disciplinary context.

### **First year (level 4 or 3 - Foundation)**

The first few weeks of the first year are crucial to a student's success at University. Programme teams should use this 'window of opportunity' to showcase high quality learning resources, engaging teaching and consistent support. Online provision and interaction should complement and support face-to-face activities in all these areas.

Literature (e.g. Tinto and Pusser, 2006) shows that first-year students' engagement and retention are defined/influenced largely by:

- Commitment to course
- Expectations of teaching and support for learning
- Academic confidence
- Time management
- Social engagement

Other factors to pay particular attention to are:

- First-year students will be particularly influenced by interpersonal interactions with both teaching and administrative staff. These are a natural part of face-to-face encounters, so effort should be made to replicate opportunities in an online environment.
- The provision of regular, short and constructive formative feedback at this stage will help students to understand expectations, experiment with learning styles and gauge their learning needs. It is important that any assessment associated with these tasks is formative and 'low stakes'.
- Some students may have particular challenges. These include:
  - First generation in HE, as they may need more support to understand academic expectations and can lack confidence in their academic ability
  - Students entering through clearing, who may not have built a relationship with the organisation
  - Students from under-represented and disadvantaged groups who, similar to those first generation entrants to HE, may lack confidence or familiarity with some of the conventions of HE and lack a sense of belonging with the institution

## 1<sup>st</sup> year activities supported by online learning/interaction \*

\*Based on Edward's model of academic progression (Edward, 2003)

<b>Establish</b>	<b>Possible activities/tools</b>
<b>Learning/process skills</b> (build confidence in their ability and skills)	<p>Tools helping to identify skill gaps, and providing students with opportunity to practise these skills, work at an individual pace, and receive positive feedback</p> <p>An early diagnostic test of students' skills</p> <p>Early formative feedback</p> <p>Required standard of assignments explained with specific examples where possible</p>
<b>Academic goal commitment</b> (course structure, content, relevance)	<p>Induction activities</p> <p>Provision of explicit instructions on Canvas module sites to orient students to module content</p> <p>Monitoring engagement</p> <p>Opportunities for progress review with the Personal Tutor</p>
<b>Professional goal commitment</b>	<p>Alumni/invited speaker talks</p> <p>Introduction into professional/academic societies</p>
<b>Institutional commitment</b> (systems, procedures, resources)	<p>Blogs, social media and videos that reflect the nature of the institution</p> <p>VLE taster sessions that enable students to explore the nature of university life before they start</p> <p>Visibility of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Library</li> <li>• SAW</li> <li>• JMSU.</li> </ul>
<b>Community commitment</b> (mentoring, tutoring, peer support)	<p>Peer mentoring</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• study buddies/peer support networks</li> </ul> <p>Personal Tutor system</p> <p>Small group tutorials</p>

## Second years (usually level 5)

Students experience a steep step up from first to second year in relation to a new set of academic skills, curriculum demands and time on task, as a result many '*struggle with competence, establishing identity and developing purpose*'.

It is important to note that:

- A long summer break is a feature of the transition between the first and second year for many students. This can be the focus of anxiety for many students. Loss of contact with the university can diminish motivation. There is also a fear that the knowledge and skills gained in the first year may atrophy.
- While expected to work with a high amount of autonomy and independence, many students were appearing to enter the second year with a misplaced sense of academic security. There is a need for academic support in planning and goal setting after the first-year assessment period.
- Dedicated second-year induction can support successful transition. It helps students to re-engage with the institution and their plans.
- Ideally, the named personal tutor should 'follow' the student into their second year to encourage continuity.
- Module leaders and tutors should continue to offer explicit expectations of workload

### 2nd year activities supported by online learning/interaction

Establish	Possible activities/tools
<b>Learning/process skills</b> (continue building more advance level skills)	Required standard of assignments explained with specific examples where possible
<b>Academic goal commitment</b> (course structure, content, relevance...)	<b>'Keeping the subject alive'</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Enthuse students toward the upcoming academic content of the second year</li><li>• Welcome students back to the academic department and programme (2<sup>nd</sup> year induction)</li><li>• Expectations of the second year discussed</li><li>• Opportunities for progress review with the Personal Tutor</li></ul>

<b>Professional goal commitment</b>	<p>Opportunities for placements/summer work/volunteering may be limited. Work with Student Advancement to fill the gap</p> <p>Professional/academic societies</p>
<b>Institutional commitment</b> (systems, procedures, resources)	<p>Ensure maintained visibility of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Library (skills workshops etc)</li> <li>• SAW (student engagement team)</li> <li>• JMSU.</li> </ul> <p>in module and programme Canvas sites</p>
<b>Community commitment</b> (mentoring, tutoring, peer support)	<p>Peer mentoring (engage 2<sup>nd</sup> years in being mentors)</p> <p>Personal Tutor system</p> <p>Small group tutorials</p> <p>Developing <b>social learning</b> approaches, promoting group work, and setting targets for the year are key priorities for the second year. Actively fostering the establishment of supportive peer groups could benefit second-year students, as this is associated with reduced personal problems such as anxiety, depression and loneliness.</p>

### Final years (usually level 6)

The final year obviously has significant meaning. Research suggests that most students will 'bounce back' from any slump they have experienced in their second year. They are also generally more confident with university processes and their own performance. That is not to say that there are not issues and concerns, particularly related to performance and unfamiliar learning experiences, notably a dissertation. **However, it is noted that level 5 students from 2019/20 have faced an extremely challenging period and may need additional support to transition into level 6.**

**In addition to standard academic support and supervision, the final years should:**

- Reinforce academic and professional goals
  - Help student to identify diverse career paths
- Strengthen commitment to the institution
  - introduction to opportunities for postgraduate study and research as valid developmental opportunities

<b>Establish</b>	<b>Possible activities/tools</b>
<b>Learning/process skills</b>	Dissertation related skills  Project management
<b>Academic goal commitment</b> (course structure, content, relevance...)	Opportunities for progress review with the Personal Tutor
<b>Professional goal commitment</b>	More active employability/further study focus  Engagement with student advancement team to support students in an uncertain labour market.  Introduction to professional community and online networking opportunities.
<b>Institutional commitment</b> (systems, procedures, resources)	Focus on further study/life-long learning.
<b>Community commitment</b> (mentoring, tutoring, peer support)	Engage in peer mentoring as a mentor  Supervisor availability is paramount

### **PGT students**

PGT students are usually a very diverse cohort that present varied levels of competency and have multiple needs. In addition, some programmes do not have a natural 'feeder' subject area and students will come from a range of disciplinary backgrounds. Students who are returning to study may also need study support to re-engage their academic skills.

The postgraduate experience for full time students can be very intense with a high workload. Conversely, part-time students may feel disconnected from the institution.

It is also noted that a challenging labour market may prompt students to undertake postgraduate study. As these may not have an intrinsic motivation for further study, care needs to be taken in how their motivation is maintained.

Important factors:

- As with all levels, students will need clear expectations regarding the formal, structured contact time with academic staff, including how academics will respond to requests from students for additional contact time.
- Recognition that while postgraduate study requires independent work and self-regulation, students still need instruction and early opportunities for formative assessment and feedback to provide reassurance that they have made the transition to Masters level learning
- Workload expectations should be explicit
- Effective supervision is a significant aspect of the student learning experience as (in most programmes) 1/3 of the final mark is associated with a supervised dissertation.
- Opportunities for peer networking and learning are important as mature and part-time students may struggle to interact with their peers without scheduled, structured peer-learning integrated into the curriculum

<b>Establish</b>	<b>Possible activities/tools</b>
<b>Learning/process skills</b> (advanced skills, level specific)	Project management skills  Enhanced level of support for mature/returning to education students
<b>Academic goal commitment</b> (course structure, content, relevance...)	Clear expectations of the workload  Course structure is explained at programme and module level
<b>Professional goal commitment</b>	Introduction to professional community, networking opportunities.
<b>Institutional commitment</b> (systems, procedures, resources)	Blogs, social media and videos that reflect the nature of the institution  VLE taster sessions that enable students to explore the nature of university life before they start  Visibility of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Library</li> <li>• SAW</li> <li>• JMSU.</li> </ul>
<b>Community commitment</b> (mentoring, tutoring, peer support)	Supervisor availability  Tutor support  Peer learning and support

## References

Edward, N. (2003) 'First Impressions Last: An Innovative Approach to Induction', *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 4(3), pp. 226-242.

Lesley Willcoxson , Julie Cotter & Sally Joy (2011) Beyond the first-year experience: the impact on attrition of student experiences throughout undergraduate degree studies in six diverse universities, *Studies in Higher Education*, 36:3, 331-352

Outcomes from the Induction and Transition Working Group, chaired by Dr Sarah Nixon

New student induction: A guide for staff. Nottingham Trent University April 2016

Lee M & Dawson G (2015) Re-thinking Student Induction. University of Birmingham

Harvey L & Drew S (with Smith M) The first-year experience: a review of literature for the, Higher Education Academy Centre for research and evaluation, Sheffield Hallam University

E.Zaitseva, S. Darwent, S.Thompson Chapter 6. Implications for student support

E.Zaitseva, C.Milsom – In their own words..