

Expanding your provision across the whole institution: mini-keynote

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Presentation abstract

This joint case study, delivered as a mini-keynote, presented and reflected on the ways in which we had adopted a whole-institution response to transition to new stages of learning and research. The case study highlighted the ways in which Learning and Researcher Development teams can offer a transformational transition experience for our students and researchers (Cage et al., 2021; Thompson, Pawson and Evans, 2021), and provided evidence of impact through evaluation and analysis.

We discussed two institution-wide projects, designed and implemented by the Learning and the Researcher Development teams at the University of Glasgow, to transform our approaches to transition for key groups of students. We also discussed the ways in which we adopted a large-scale approach that provided for excellence in student and researcher transition into our institution.

The questions used the focus the small group discussions were:

- What are the key needs of students transitioning into, through and out of your institution?
- What are the key challenges and opportunities for working at scale across (large areas of) your institution?
- In an ideal world, what large-scale initiative would you pick to do first to most benefit your students? Why?

Keywords: transition; academic success; retention and success.

Community response

Delegates at the session observed that a benefit of the approach taken at Glasgow was to make early inroads into the challenging task of putting Learning Development in the fronts of students' minds, and then sustaining that:

Thank you for sharing your Learning Development approaches to transitioning at university with these fascinating programmes. I think that as well as them being transformative for the student and helping them to understand academic expectations at university, they also engrain your service into the students' consciousness right from the beginning, which as we know is sometimes half the battle! Certainly does better than the one-shot approach in Welcome Week.

Another delegate, Sam Gridley from University of Surrey, commented on the apparent level of nurturing that had been required to make the scheme successful:

It was also interesting to hear that a large-scale initiative such as this can (and does) work with careful planning, management and nurturing. Congratulations on your success and please do keep us updated with how it develops in future years.

Editorial comment

What comes through clearly from the abstract and the responses is that with sustained passion, commitment and strategic thinking, the task of embedding learning/research development approaches at the whole-institutional level is not mission impossible. The presenters' work also has the benefit of adding evidence in support of something that the ALDinHE community has long-discussed: that making our approaches more mainstream for students from an early stage of their programmes is to everyone's benefit. The community can take heart from initiatives at scale such as this one. The synergies between Learning Development and Research Development provision, and how each can learn from and complement the other are another important point to be highlighted here. It

seems that Researcher Development programmes often start from an LD standpoint and with LD professionals involved, which is something many of us might like to consider as an opportunity at our universities.

Authors' reflection

As highlighted in the comments, our key approach here has been to try to embed within university culture the concept of the 'long induction'. Rather than a one-off event, likely to be soon forgotten by our new students after joining, we view induction and transition as an ongoing event within our students' lives. We are not alone or novel in taking this approach, but we have used structured, systematic, large-scale approaches to enhance the experience for our students.

The intention from this, then, is to provide students with many of the tools, attributes, capacities and capabilities required for success as they transition into their first year (of study or of postgraduate research). In so doing, we aim to embed within our students' minds the necessity of engaging with academic literacies, with Learning Development and Researcher Development practices, as central elements of their time with us. The comments provided above echo many of the elements we view to be so crucial.

Attendees have commented on the maintenance and nurturing undertaken as part of our approach over the years. Development of our initiatives have taken account not only of the aims and objectives of the staff placed in charge of running them, but also of the GTAs and RAs tasked with creating, delivering and maintaining them year-on-year. Through this collaborative approach, then, we have found that the content of the teaching materials, the tone and style of delivery, and the underpinning objectives of the programmes are able to respond to the changing needs and preferences of the incoming students who will become their audiences.

The beneficial mutual relationship between Learning Development and Research Development provision was noted in the editorial comments, as was the frequency of shared professional backgrounds. This prompted us to reflect on the nature of our relationship and the factors that we feel contribute to its success.

Our approach here has been to actively foster ties between these two services at our institution, with a similar awareness of not just shared backgrounds, but shared concerns. Issues such as transition, community building, identity and integration are not unique to any specific cohort: they are relevant across all contexts. The topic of academic identity, for example, is as relevant for those in the final stages of the PhD as it is for new undergraduates commencing their studies. We have found it hugely beneficial to take a broad approach to these topics – focusing on concerns as opposed to cohorts – benefitting from our shared expertise and ensuring a pedagogically coherent and thoughtful approach across cohorts.

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