



Glasgow Essentials: redeveloping induction resources to improve the students' sense of inclusion and belonging

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Presentation abstract

Students' sense of inclusion and belonging is a key factor in their success and satisfaction throughout their studies, driving positive results in attainment, retention, and wellbeing. The ability of students to belong and self-identify as members of the academic community has been referred to as a key 'intangible asset' (Smart et al., 2020) in higher education. Indeed, MacFarlane (2018) asserts that this sense of belonging is closely aligned with learner identity and student engagement, and that students who do not feel properly engaged or that they belong are unlikely to successfully transition into university. It is therefore crucial that universities begin to foster feelings of inclusion and build a sense of belonging among students at the earliest stages of the induction process.

This presentation showcased the re-evaluated and redesigned 'Glasgow Essentials' resource produced by the newly formed Induction and Transitions team at the University of Glasgow. The resource follows the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Hidden Curriculum model (Birtill et al., 2022), utilising the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (Rose and Meyer, 2000) to promote new students' sense of inclusion and belonging and improve their experience of transitions through each stage of their studies. Glasgow Essentials is an interactive and informative online resource, covering both academic and non-academic aspects of induction, and is shared with all offer holders as they prepare to begin their studies. It is therefore likely to be the first resource they will engage with at the university, playing a crucial role in new students' induction into the institution and setting

them up for success in their studies. The presentation explained the evaluation undertaken in redeveloping Glasgow Essentials and the rationale for its redesign before showcasing the resource itself and discussing our plans to evaluate its impact on students' inclusion, belonging, and – hopefully – success going forward.

Keywords: inclusion; induction; belonging; student support; learner identity.

Community response

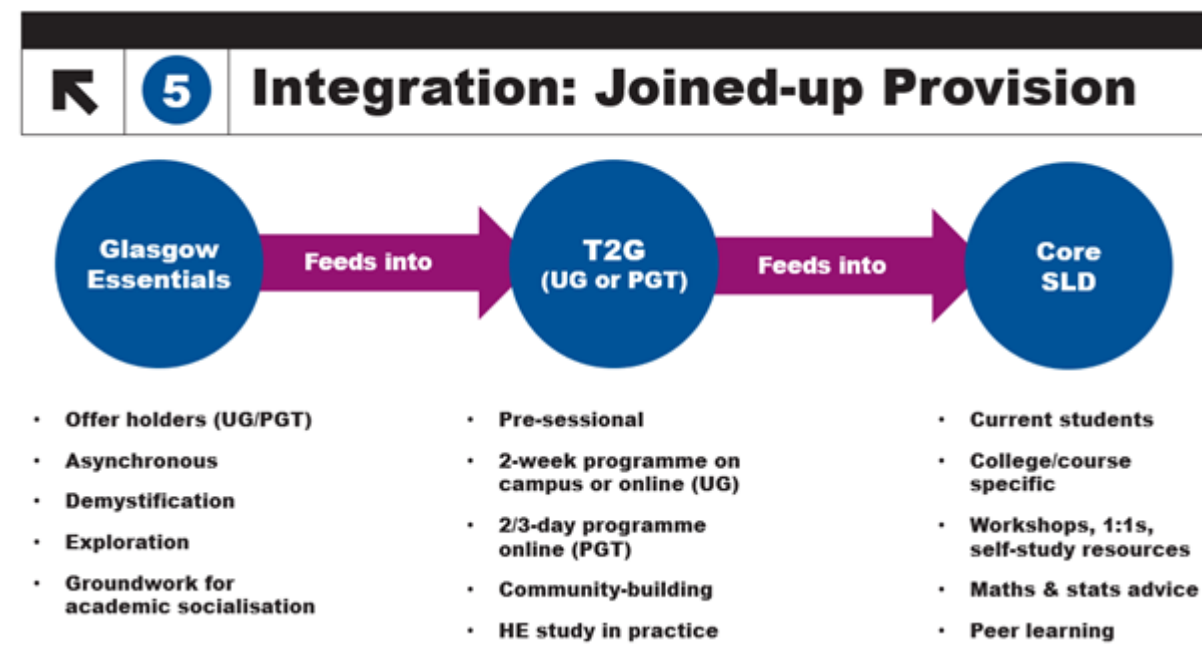
This resource has sparked reflection within the learning development community on the various components that constitute induction, and how important it is for students to feel 'seen' before they even arrive. It is these more 'intangible' aspects of induction that are often more challenging to capture and target, but which can have a huge impact on a student's perceptions as they transition to an institution.

Building a digital induction module to *change* to respond to the needs of the individual student: what a dash of genius that is! ...The responsiveness of the module makes the student feel seen, whether they consciously clock that or not; it is not the same dish served up to thousands, but a bespoke meal.

The value of this showcase was not only the demonstration of the tool, but the demonstration of the thought processes that have gone into the whole process of induction design holistically.

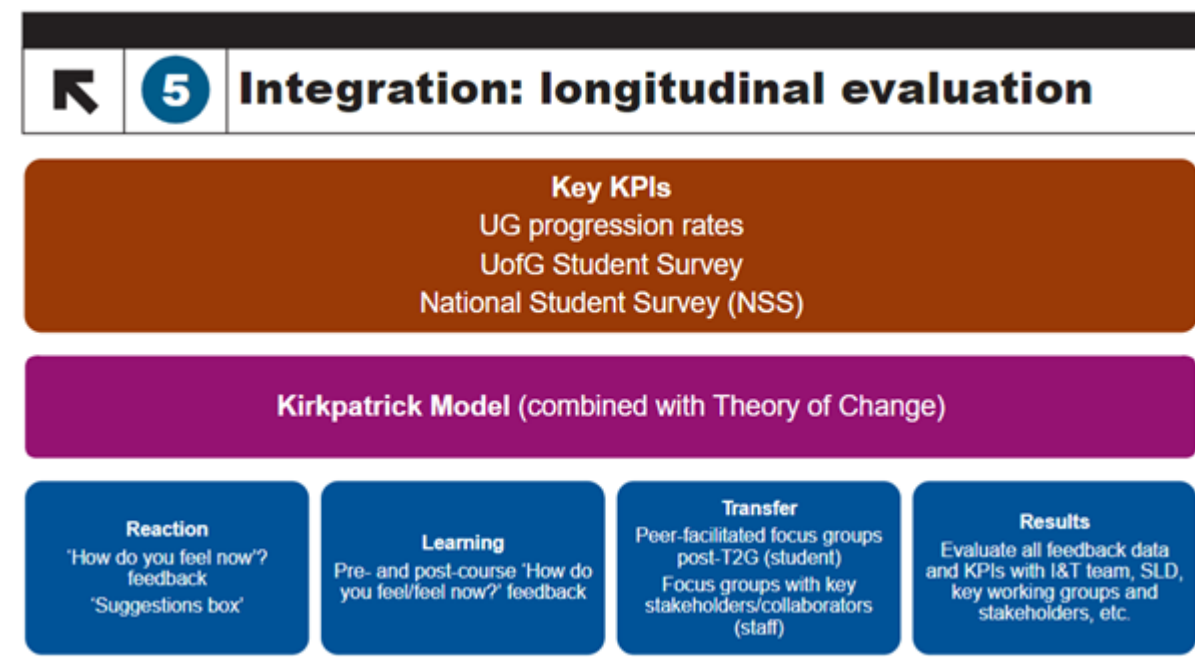
'Glasgow Essentials' forms one element within a wider process of induction and transition to enhance, rather than constitute the basis of a student's induction, as illustrated in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1. Glasgow Essentials in context (presentation screenshot).



With current students having experienced considerable disruption to their education during the COVID-19 pandemic, and student mental health being increasingly recognised as an important consideration, many institutions are wrestling with the question of how to develop and resource methods that enable students to feel a strong sense of belonging. It is vital to share good practice in this area to address these challenges effectively to benefit students, and to evaluate their ongoing and long-term effects on student experiences, as the Glasgow project is doing (Figure 2).

Where technical solutions can be employed to enhance this process, they may prove both innovatively supportive to students while being attractive institutionally for their cost-efficiencies. It is also important to consider the role of the learning developer in the selection and use of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) and the development of their constituent tools and resources.

Figure 2. Evaluating Glasgow Essentials (presentation screenshot).

Next steps and additional questions

The Glasgow Essentials package has provoked wider consideration of approaches to student induction and the use of interactive resources to guide them into their course of study. From the community response, several questions arise, including:

- What models of good practice in induction support are emerging across the sector?
- What is the role of the learning developer in this work, and are there ways in which learning developers could be more meaningfully engaged in the process of evaluating the uses of virtual learning environments (VLEs) to support students, through induction and beyond?

Authors' reflection

We feel strongly that students should feel *seen* in their journeys into – and through – university. The positive responses from colleagues to our endeavours to embed this approach at the offer-holder stage are therefore heartening. From conversations within the

learning development community, we are aware that students' sense of inclusion and belonging is becoming an increasingly important focus within the induction and transitions space, and that many of our concerns regarding their health and wellbeing, financial struggles and time poverty are shared across the sector. While a resource like Glasgow Essentials cannot resolve these sector-wide issues, we do see real value in acknowledging them and the students who face them from the outset.

Like many of our colleagues, we are also progressively aligning our approach to fostering students' sense of inclusion and belonging with the more recent scholarship on the concept of 'mattering' (for example, Seary et al., 2023). This conceptual development emphasises the institution's responsibility to meet the students where and as they are in order to make its learning spaces as welcoming and inclusive as possible to all students, regardless of their background or circumstances. This, we believe, is a key principle underpinning good practice in induction and transitions work emerging across the sector and it will continue to guide our work as we develop the Glasgow Essentials resource alongside our other projects.

As the community response identified, and as shown in Figure 1, Glasgow Essentials is only the first part of broader induction and transition provision at the University of Glasgow, encouraging students to engage with our Transition to Glasgow programmes and wider academic literacies courses. Our Induction and Transitions team sits within the larger Student Learning Development (SLD) team at the University of Glasgow, so we work closely with learning development colleagues working across the university and, as a team, very much come from a learning development perspective ourselves.

At the same time, however, a collaborative, cross-institutional approach that involves colleagues across the university's four colleges and many services is essential to the success of our induction and transitions provision. This is something we acknowledge not only in the kind of collaborative projects we wish to add to our portfolio of provision going forward but also in our longitudinal evaluation plans, as shown in Figure 2. As part of both the 'transfer' and 'results' stages of evaluation, we will include qualitative input from our key collaborators, which will in turn involve input from the team of learning developers working in SLD (as well as other colleagues across the institution). The main purpose in doing so is to gauge the efficacy of our induction provision and its connection to the college- and/or cohort-specific work being done by our learning developers (again, as well

as College- and/or cohort-specific induction provision across the institution) to embed the longitudinal perspective we wish to adopt, accounting for not only induction and transitions *into* the University but also *through* each stage of their studies.

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