

Mind the gap: transitions into higher education

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Outline

Why is transition important?

What are the challenges for students and university staff?

What is “good practice”?



What is transition?

Oxford English Dictionary: “The **process** or a **period** of **changing** from one state or condition to another”.

*E.g. “students **in transition** from one programme to another”.*



Why is transition important?

8% of students across the UK withdraw from their course during the first year of undergraduate study.

33-44% of first-year undergraduates consider withdrawing (Thomas, 2012).

Variation between institutions, and between discipline areas within institutions, and for some demographic groupings.



Why is transition important?

“I’d like to know more about how to make my teaching more inclusive for these new students – appreciating the issues underlying school-HE transition will help this”.

What are the challenges?

Think back to your own first day at university, or your first day in your new job here:

What were your anxieties?

What did you look forward to?

How did the reality compare to your expectations?

What surprised you?



What are the challenges?

Identity and development;

Psychosocial factors and adjustment;

Perceived lack of support;



What are the challenges?

Learning, teaching and assessment methods;

Disciplinary understanding;

Prior learning;

First-year curriculum;

Academic skills.

“Students learning in a certain way at school that then has to be unlearned.”



Student expectations

Yorke and Longden (2008) – a frequently cited reason for withdrawal by students is “wrong field of study”; lack of understanding of the nature of the discipline they have chosen.

Winstone and Bretton (2013) – the “expectation-reality gap”
- independent learning, teaching methods, achievement standards.

Rowley, Hartley and Larkin (2008) – unrealistic expectations lead to academic disengagement.

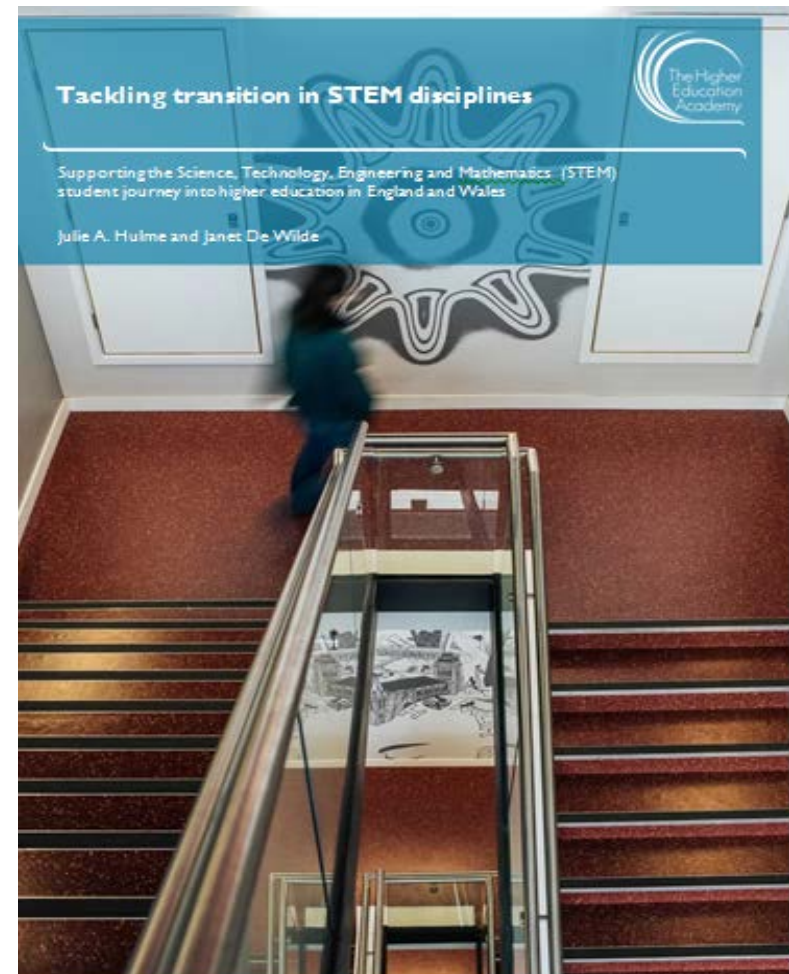
What do your students expect?

How much do you know about your students' prior learning experiences and curricula?

To what extent will Curriculum for Excellence impact upon their expectations?

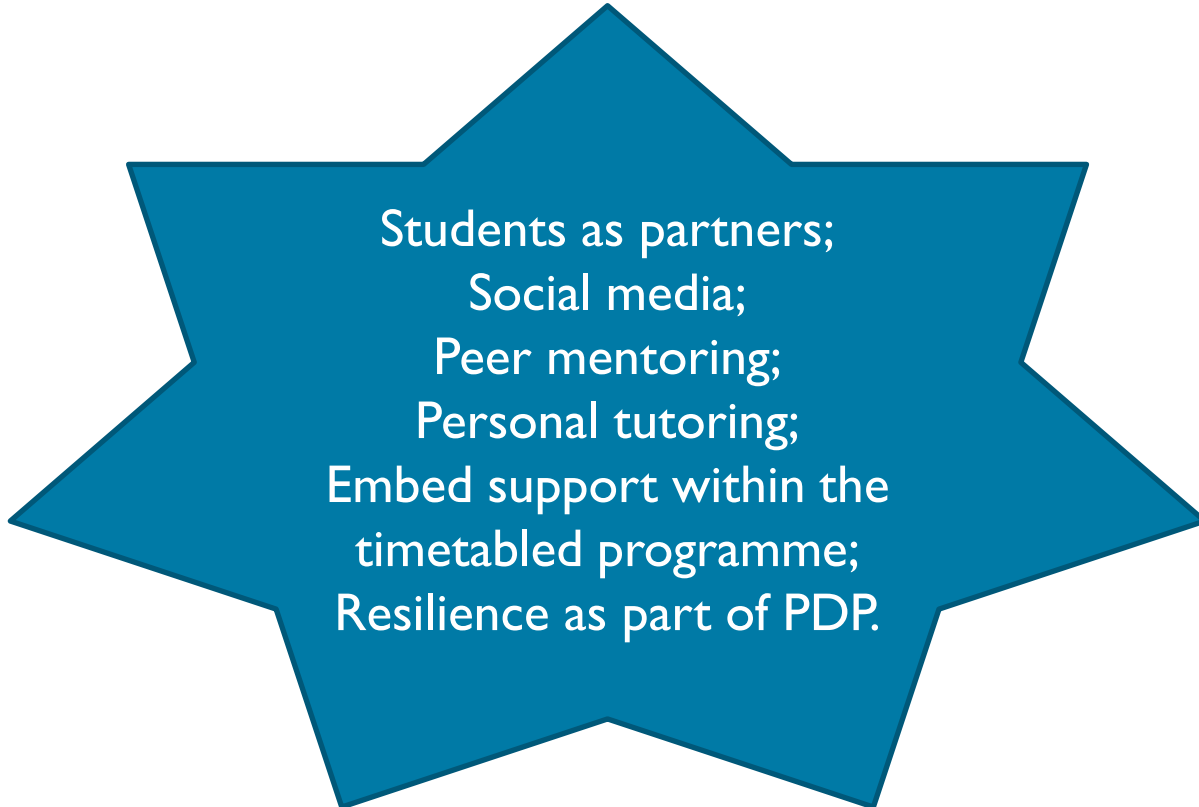
“Despite working with schools a great deal, I learnt some very interesting things about what A level Physics students do and don't do as part of their courses these days... We need to talk to ... teachers far more, and to the incoming students, to find out what they (should) know – not make assumptions based on what we think is the case”

Tackling transition – what can we do?



What can we do?

Provide psychosocial support – build a community, a sense of belonging, develop students' confidence and resilience.



Students as partners;
Social media;
Peer mentoring;
Personal tutoring;
Embed support within the
timetabled programme;
Resilience as part of PDP.

What can we do?

Scaffolded learning approaches – building on prior learning and experiences, facilitating gradual development, using active learning and authentic assessment methods.



Know about school/college
teaching;
Enquiry-based learning
approaches;
Authentic assessment;
Explicit criteria;
Skills development and support.

What can we do?

Sharing knowledge, practice and resources across different parts of the education system: more collaboration between schools, colleges and universities – between staff and students.



- Social media;
- Peer mentoring;
- Laboratory and library days;
- Conferences and taster days;
- Swapping CPD.

What's in it for us?

Improved retention and achievement rates;

Enhanced student engagement and satisfaction;

Confident students with improved academic skills and more autonomy;

Students who are better prepared for transition to graduate success.



Questions and comments?

