

Student Transitions

Learning and Teaching Enhancement Project Report, May 2016

Project Title: Transitioning – Experience Counts

School & department: MACS

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1	<p><i>Names and Heriot-Watt University contact details of project team (<u>please identify the project lead/ report author</u>):</i></p> <p>Darren Cunningham E-mail: D.P.Cunningham@hw.ac.uk Phone: 0131 451 4360</p>
2	<p><i>Key words:</i></p> <p>Transition, Transitioning, Experience, College, University, Challenges, Overcoming Challenges, Opportunities</p>
3	<p><i>The problem being addressed, with background and context:</i></p> <p>Many University students come from diverse backgrounds in to a University environment. As such they face a transition of some sort. With this in mind the transition from College to University is one such pathway. Those that undertake this journey do so for a reason, and equally face many challenges, but then realise an opportunity that they would otherwise not have if it wasn't for this transitioning experience. Therefore, there is much to be learned from these experiences as a phenomenological exploration in to what is common in respect to motives, challenges, means of overcoming adversity, and eventually the opportunities realised. It is hoped that such experiences help existing University students to know that they share similar experiences that should be talked about and shared. Similarly, prospective University students at College gain an insight in to what to expect from transitioning from a College experience in to a University experience. Hence the problem being addressed here is whether or not to make that transition and how to overcome the challenges this entails to obtain the best possible educational outcome and develop a worthwhile career. This is all about learning from the student experience, enhanced use of technology to provide peer support, and providing an insight for education professionals in to what factors help to attract and retain students in higher education institutions.</p>
4	<p><i>Project overview & aims:</i></p> <p><i>Overview:</i> This project seeks to produce a video as a multi-media web based communication tool to disseminate the real life experiences of students and their learnings and personal insights having recently transitioned from College to University. The driver to present these experiences is that we do not expose enough students to the experiences of others who have recently undergone significant transitions which all hold valuable learning experiences. By approaching the topic of transition in this way it is hoped that College students will be more confident in making the same transitions and contribute their learning experiences in the same way. The next stage of this project</p>

Student Transitions

	<p>would be to strategically promote these videos and make them easily accessible. Certainly with the advent of handheld technologies and proliferation of social media amongst young people it is inevitable to our communications reach must extend to embracing how they choose to engage with the wider world and what influences their decisions.</p> <p><i>Aims:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To capture a wide range of first hand learning experiences from a diverse set of individuals across many points of transition from College to University. 2. Produce a multi-media online based learning and promotional material that evidences the essence of why transitioning offers its own unique learning experiences. 3. Demonstrate that the resonating experiences gleaned from transitioning have impact on how individuals view their education, their future opportunities, and world view generally. 4. To position real world learning via transitioning at the core of how we promote learning and teaching at Heriot Watt. 5. Begin to build enthusiasm for the positive nature of transitioning which can be used in future projects in different contexts.
5	<p><i>Activities and details of project steps taken to achieve aims:</i></p> <p>The project lead has been able to elicit the assistance of many academic Schools and the Student Union to stimulate the involvement of a wide range of students with diverse backgrounds. These students have not only provided their valuable experiences of transitioning but some have also had a major input in determining the creative nature of how the end video should look and feel.</p> <p>The filming of 10 students has taken place and the raw material produced evidences each of their unique experiences and how they have gone about making a successful transition from College in to University life.</p> <p>The special effects currently being incorporated through the editing process on to the video is taken from best practice around student centred creative input and is designed to extract all resonating learning points and maximise their impact of those viewing the video.</p> <p>Collating these learning points in to themes and having them visible in text in the background across the entire running time of the video, produces an impact which puts real world learning at the core of how we promote learning and teaching at the University.</p> <p>It is clear even from the activity that has taken place so far in the filming and editing process that the video promotes the experience of transitioning as worthwhile. So in that sense there is a clear message that can inform future projects. In addition, educational professionals are to be provided with an insight in to how best to address concerns in relation to the real life challenges of making such transitions when viewing the video.</p>
6	<p><i>Key points including challenges your team may have encountered:</i></p>

Student Transitions

The first challenge was engaging enough University students from various Academic Schools and via the Student Union to provide creative ideas behind making the video appealing to College students, University students, and education professionals. This was achieved by hosting drop in sessions and viewing existing student based video productions as well as attending the Student Union Student Representatives monthly meeting.

The second key challenge was to seek enough participants with recent and relevant experience of transitioning between College to University willing to talk about their experiences on camera in a studio environment. This was achieved by e-mailing all students via their respective School Offices with a project brief and offering a £20 Amazon gift voucher as a thank you for taking part.

The third challenge was selecting the most relevant material from the large volume of footage taken to extract all of the valuable learning points from the participants' experiences which are highly relevant to understanding transitioning motives, challenges, overcoming challenges, and opportunities as the underpinning narrative for the production of an engaging video.

The fourth and final challenge was in physically producing the video with a limited resource within the University's AV Department and amidst some Technical Staff sickness absence. This was achieved via the professionalism and diligence of a small handful of skilled technicians.

7a Describe specific project outputs so far:

The first draft of the creative video has been produced which includes the experiences of 10 students. This video is now set to be edited in to around 5 minutes running time and incorporate some special effects projected on to a background blue screen which will highlight the learning that has taken place. The volume and quality of learning points presents the impact of the transitional experience for those that have recent first hand exposure to the challenges of making a transition between College and University.

The specific project outputs so far in terms of learning points have been:

1. Introduction
The range of access points that offer experiences of transitioning in to a University education as well as experiences of preparing for this transition at College including personal expectations of advancement in to higher education.
2. Challenges
Commonality of the challenges faced by students who transition and the impact that this has on their ability to integrate with other students as well as cope with the demands placed on them of having to academically perform at a higher level.
3. Overcoming Challenges
Ways in which these students learn how to adapt to greater academic demands and

Student Transitions

	<p>complexity of the social environment of a University setting, and how experiences of integrating these can increase their capacity to cope better with the demands placed on them to ultimately achieve their desired goals.</p> <p>4. Opportunities To compare and contrast what their expectations were and how these have translated in to reality as well as what opportunities are realised through the transition process which were not anticipated and could act as motivating factors for others to consider making the same transition.</p>
7b	<p>Media output? Yes</p> <p>A creative video has been produced which captures several students experiences of transitioning from College to University from diverse backgrounds.</p>
8	<p>Please describe how your project has contributed to the Heriot-Watt University strategy and priorities for Enhancement in terms of changes brought about to date, which may be described in terms of combinations of strategy, policy or practice (as relevant):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Shorter time to completion for Post-graduate Research students (PGR) (strategy, policy, practice) 2. Improved retention and progression of undergraduate students (strategy, policy, practice) 3. Graduate attributes (strategy, policy, practice) <p>The project is still in progress and has not yet been fully completed. However, in terms of how it will contribute to the Heriot Watt University strategy and priorities for enhancement, it will improve the retention and progression of UG students and inform graduate attributes.</p> <p>Firstly, by identifying and understanding the challenges faced by students making a transition from College to University it is possible to better inform the strategy for retaining students making this transition. It is possible to implement specific support mechanisms in practice to intervene and help students overcome these challenges by drawing on what these students say has helped to overcome their challenges at various identifiable stages in their experiences of transitioning.</p> <p>Secondly, what these students' experiences offer is an insight in to how they have learned to cope with challenges and what opportunities have emerged because of what they have personally done. Here it can be identified what made this possible in terms of skills and knowledge they have acquired as well as personal qualities that they have developed through their education and experience and incorporate these in to the graduate attributes strategy, policy, and practice. By doing this it is hoped that these students will recognise what they have achieved and how this learning can be drawn upon again when making further transitions, typically from University in to work, and at various points as</p>

Student Transitions

	they progress along their chosen career path.
9	<p><i>Describe how you are sharing good practice within Heriot-Watt and beyond. In particular, give details of any liaison with other universities in Scotland (e.g. plans for papers, attendance at conferences):</i></p> <p>The intension is to showcase the video at the Learning and Teaching Symposium on 26th October 2016. Then make the video available online and to the University's marketing department for prospective students. The video will be sent to local Colleges for use in careers guidance and for student support purposes. Finally, the video will be available on social media to be viewed globally by a wide range of interested parties.</p>
10	<p><i>Next steps:</i></p> <p>The next steps are to complete the editing process and finalise the video with all of the background effects. Once this is complete the video will be sent to all of the participating students and to various Heads of School and the University President for comments. Then the video will be sent to members of the panel that endorsed this project at Heriot Watt.</p>
11	<p><i>Additional information:</i></p> <p>Many of the participants themselves are interested in being involved in the rollout of the video and acting in an ambassador role to interactively promote their real world experiences of transitioning, which was not originally envisaged but can be incorporated in to the project as offering some additional value.</p>

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