Higher Education Student Support Champion in partnership with Unite Students: Transition into Higher Education for Young Students

Roundtable three summary: The possibilities, benefits, and challenges of information sharing pre-enrolment and its implications for transition into HE

Chair: Edward Peck, HE Student Support Champion

Date/time: 15 September 2023, 10:00 – 11:30

Agenda:

Agenda item	Duration	Topic	Lead
1	5	Welcome and Introduction	Chair
2	15	Transitions into HE	Dr Michelle Morgan, Dean of Students, University of East London
5	60	Discussion	Participants
6	10	Close – what do we do next?	Chair

Welcome and introduction

- Edward Peck began the session by summarising the conclusions of the previous two roundtables which explored the changing needs of younger students and how information sharing processes can improve HE transition activities.
- The aim of the roundtable was to establish priorities for the HE Student Support Champion.

Michelle Morgan – Transition to HE

- Michelle Morgan, Dean of Students at University of East London, presented her view of issues surrounding transition. She noted that many HE functions are based on an assumption of students having a homogenous learning experience (e.g. classroom based A-levels). She encouraged a data driven inclusive design throughout the student lifecycle including in induction activities. At the same time, she observed that changes in the HE environment in the past decade have resulted in more centralised approaches which can overlook the impact of divergent prior learning experiences.

- The importance of honesty and transparency with students was discussed, in particular in relation to the influence that cultural depictions of the typical HE experience can have on student expectations. Michelle noted also that students often do not have the information about the full range of post-16 options available to them.
- Michelle highlighted the impact of young people moving from scaffolded learning to an independent learning environment, often without recognition of prior learning experiences. She commented on the closure of libraries and other local facilities that have reduced pupils' ability to develop independent study skills.

Discussion

- In common with the two previous roundtables, participants agreed that it was becoming more challenging to support students in the transition period. It was suggested that this could be due to lower in person engagement, increased student expectations, and lack of data/data infrastructure to understand students as much as we might like.
- It was noted (again, as in previous sessions) that the support available in schools may be contributing to greater expectations of support in HE.
- Participants noted behaviour changes in students, including some experiencing loneliness earlier than in previous years. Possible causes included the decline of human connectivity and lower levels of social confidence. Some participants have seen an increasing social divide in student accommodation based on price, leading to feelings of marginalisation.
- There was a recognition throughout the discussion that students' background characteristics (including prior learning experiences) can impact the student experience during transition. HEPs should be alert to this. There was support for development of consistent data sharing or entry surveys that would increase understanding of individual students in advance of enrolment. It was noted that there is currently work in this space being undertaken within the sector to learn from current initiatives.
- Challenges in introducing consistent approaches in pre-enrolment surveys include: limited institutional resources to review pre-arrival information; absence of appropriate structures to share and act on information; potential for some students to avoid completion unless it is made a compulsory part of signing on; lack of openness and/or realism amongst some students about their challenges; and complexity of capturing students who may enrol though alternative routes (e.g. international students).
- At least one HEP has a writing task that has to be completed during the enrolment period which encourages and enables students to share information about themselves. This may be a fruitful addition to the survey, albeit the challenges outlined in the previous paragraph still stand and some student cohorts may find this requirement off-putting.
- Participants considered how information gathered through surveys and other methods could be used to inform both proactive support to individual students as well as to plan both targeted and comprehensive interventions though insights gained from 'big data'.
- It was noted that schools, healthcare providers, and other community organisations may have pertinent information about students' vulnerabilities which are not available to HEPs but may be useful in ensuring sufficient support is available. Participants discussed ethical, practical, and GDPR considerations of requesting and using such information.
- Most interest lay in access to more information from schools and colleges, which might encompass direct and indirect access to that shared with them by other

agencies. This had been a major focus of the previous roundtable; on reflection, the most plausible short-term route to collect information was through questionnaires administered and references pursued by UCAS.

- UCAS was undergoing a reform of its pre-enrolment information collection programme and there may be a willingness to explore how UCAS may be able to support the harvesting and passing on of additional information. It was recognised that ethical consideration would need to be given to this latter aspect, not least discussion of how students would be informed of and consent to the use of personal information gathered by a different organisation from a range of sources when they were children and adolescents.
- Another topic related to the downsides of the predominant, and almost unique, UK pattern of young people moving long distances to enter HE. The benefits to students of studying local to their place of origin may be underrated: potential for structured handover from secondary to tertiary education and thus improved information, advice, and guidance; continuity of support networks, both personal and professional; reduction in outgoings and continuation of current employment; and familiarity with place.
- In this context, which group of students really constitutes those who should be called 'commuter' students?

Summary – what next?

- Edward Peck closed the session by reflecting on what the Student Support Champion could do to address some the issues raised:
  - Further consider the methods by which intelligence - particularly sensitive intelligence held by schools and other organisation - could be shared with HEPs. Additions to the UCAS application questionnaire and reference collection processes garnered significant support amongst participants and will be followed up over the next few weeks.
  - The advantages of more students studying closer to their point of origin will be explored further. Consideration of how the Lifelong Learning Entitlement may influence students' choices to study locally or at a decelerated rate should be discussed here. This will be followed up early next calendar year.
  - A consistent approach to a pre-arrival questionnaire was proposed. There is work being undertaken by others in the sector at present on this, therefore the role of the Student Support Champion could be to promote rather than lead.