
FE to HE transition support

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Area of Focus

Interventions and programmes to support internal student transition from Further Education to Higher Education within the school of Animal, Rural and Environmental Sciences.

Context

Attainment disparities for BTEC students are a priority for ARES, particularly because of the high number of students entering with a BTEC (34%) and an ever-increasing percentage of vocational-entry students transitioning internally from the school's Further Education to Higher Education courses. Moreover, the profile of BTEC students shows the highest level of intersectionality across all other Success for All groups. School colleagues felt that addressing issues surrounding the performance of BTEC-entry students should benefit all students who were likely to struggle.

Approach

To gain greater insights regarding the provision required to support internal student transition from FE to HE, the school set up a student focus group comprised of first year undergraduate students studying at Brackenhurst who have undertaken a BTEC qualification at ARES the previous year. Using the qualitative data from this focus group as well as drawing upon key literature and speaking to academic staff from both FE and HE, there were four main interventions implemented.

Interventions

1. An ARES FE-HE Student Transition Group and a formalised co-mentoring programme.

This co-mentoring programme pairs — in cognate areas — colleagues who teach on Further Education courses with those on Higher Education courses. The aim is to build understanding of each other's respective curricula, assessment, pedagogies and pastoral activities. In this way, colleagues can make changes to their teaching and assessment practices based on knowledge of students' prior learning. For example, if a course has a large cohort of students from vocational FE courses, who may not have had the opportunity to develop exam skills, the course team can introduce more formative support to address this gap. Alternatively, they can adjust the assessment format to enable students to demonstrate their learning in other ways.

2. Working with the FE Senior Management Team to implement and support revision and exam best practice across the curriculum via staff training and curriculum design meetings.
3. Collaboration with CenSCE to support internal student transition via various programmes targeted to ARES FE students.
 - Raising Attainment with Resilience - a targeted five-week (one hour per week) programme aimed at a selected group of identified Level 3 students who struggle to maintain their academic performance during the pressure of exams and tests.
 - Developing young people as social researchers – a ten-week (one hour per week) programme aimed at developing critical thinking skills, research techniques and analytical skills by conducting research that aims to explore what it means to belong at NTU.

4. FE-HE Student Transition Day (running in May).

In 16/17 and 17/18 academic years ARES has delivered an FE-HE student transition day to help prepare FE students for Higher Education and Employability. Sessions have included; 'understanding the student and academic tutor role in HE', 'how to get the best results at HE', and 'academic writing and academic referencing at HE'. In 2018/19, the Steps to Success programme by CenCSE (a 2-day programme specifically designed for BTEC students to aid in their transition to university) will proceed the FE-HE transition day in the same week.

Initial Outcomes

These four interventions have offered a holistic approach to meeting the needs of BTEC students for ARES and the school is already seeing a marked improvement in students' attitudes towards the transition to HE and to their grades. Whilst the outcomes of these interventions need to be evaluated further, a course team member expressed that the collaboration with CenSCE has been

“really positive – the students seem to be benefitting from the work and it has also helped staff to start integrating different types of assessments and lecturing methods, so the students are getting more of a taste of what it is like to be a HE student and it is preparing them and supporting student transition.”

Since these interventions were implemented, the number of ARES FE students progressing to Higher Education courses has increased. Moreover, the BTEC progression gap in ARES has almost halved from 13.9% in 2016/17 to 7.7% in 2017/18.

Finally, to ensure sustainability for these programmes of intervention, ARES is building an infrastructure that supports these changes and can monitor and evaluate them consistently. A Student Transition Working Group has been established as well as more signposting information for points of contact in relation to this work.

Challenges and next steps

Looking forward, ARES will explore how best to monitor efficacy and encourage participation within the co-mentoring programme, as well as effectively evaluate the impact of the various interventions on student transition and impact.

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