

Embedding higher level study skills in transition curricula to improve retention

6th Annual Conference on Student Retention
and Progression in Higher Education
25th January, 2011

Lost in Transition?

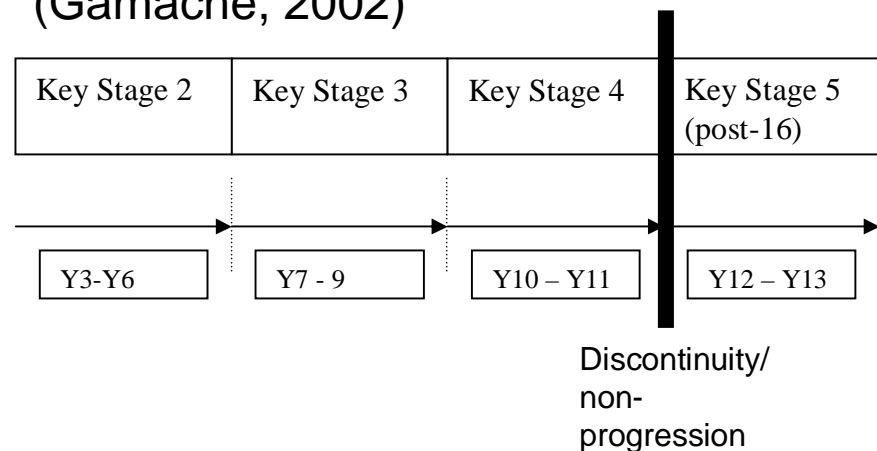
- When students face transition, there is anxiety around a certain range of issues:
 - Leaving friends behind
 - Small building to much bigger space(s)
 - Concerns over workload
 - More academic activities
 - A broader curriculum becomes more specialised
 - Different types of assessment
 - ... the big unknown

Typical issues identified in as potential barriers in transition (II):

- Issues identified by a group of primary and secondary teachers during *Training for Transition* as being crucial in the process of transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3
- Similar issues are identified at different phase interfaces,
- They resurface in the transition process to Higher Education
 - *Students entering HE are not adequately prepared; not equipped with 'self-learning skills' (Wingate, 2007)*

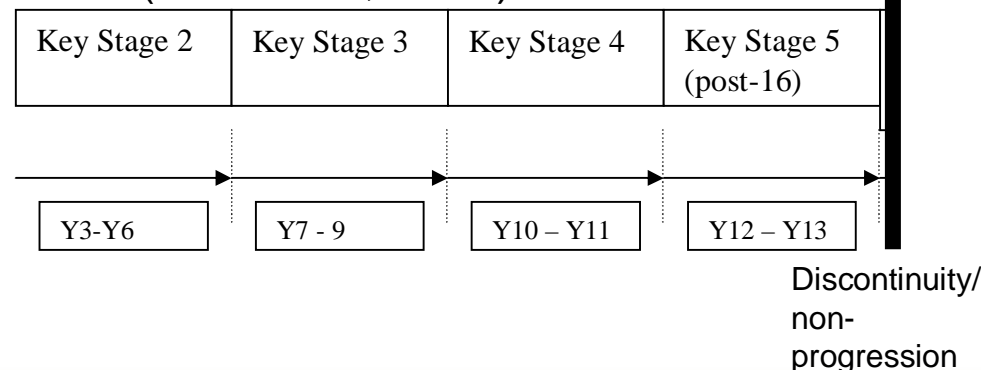
Too often points of transition become exit points

- In compulsory education this is not necessarily literal exit, but relates to loss of motivation and ultimately attainment
- Students 'learn to fail' (Brighouse, 2009)
- Mis-match of expectations and reality of experience
 - Students see learning as an experience of 'passive absorption' (Gamache, 2002)



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Transition to HE – what works?

- Transition support is appreciated by students
- Reference made by 6th form students to expectations
- Subject level of support
- Early experience of teaching and learning style beneficial
- Independent learning skills vital
 - Some schools prepare well
 - Ongoing and continuous focus
 - Embedded across subjects in pre-entry curriculum
 - Discreet vs embedded delivery

Harnisch, Sargeant, Winter (2011)

Transition to Higher Education

- Hypothesis
 - Transition to HE begins earlier in a student's life cycle
 - The 'first year' is, in fact, year 14
 - Early engagement with students can develop skills, knowledge and competencies
 - Transition strategies may be 'translated' across educational interfaces
 - Moving away from 'deficit model' towards more constructive and anticipatory early engagement model

Transition activities at our Academies - rationale

- Raising aspiration
- Building skills for transition
 - Skills for independent learning
 - Subject knowledge and skills
 - Involvement in vertically organised learning
- Spiky learning (across transition stages) impacting positively on attainment levels in current phase
- Involving and developing staff
- Impact on retention at pre-entry
- Impact on retention at undergraduate level

The Extended Project Qualification at NEWA

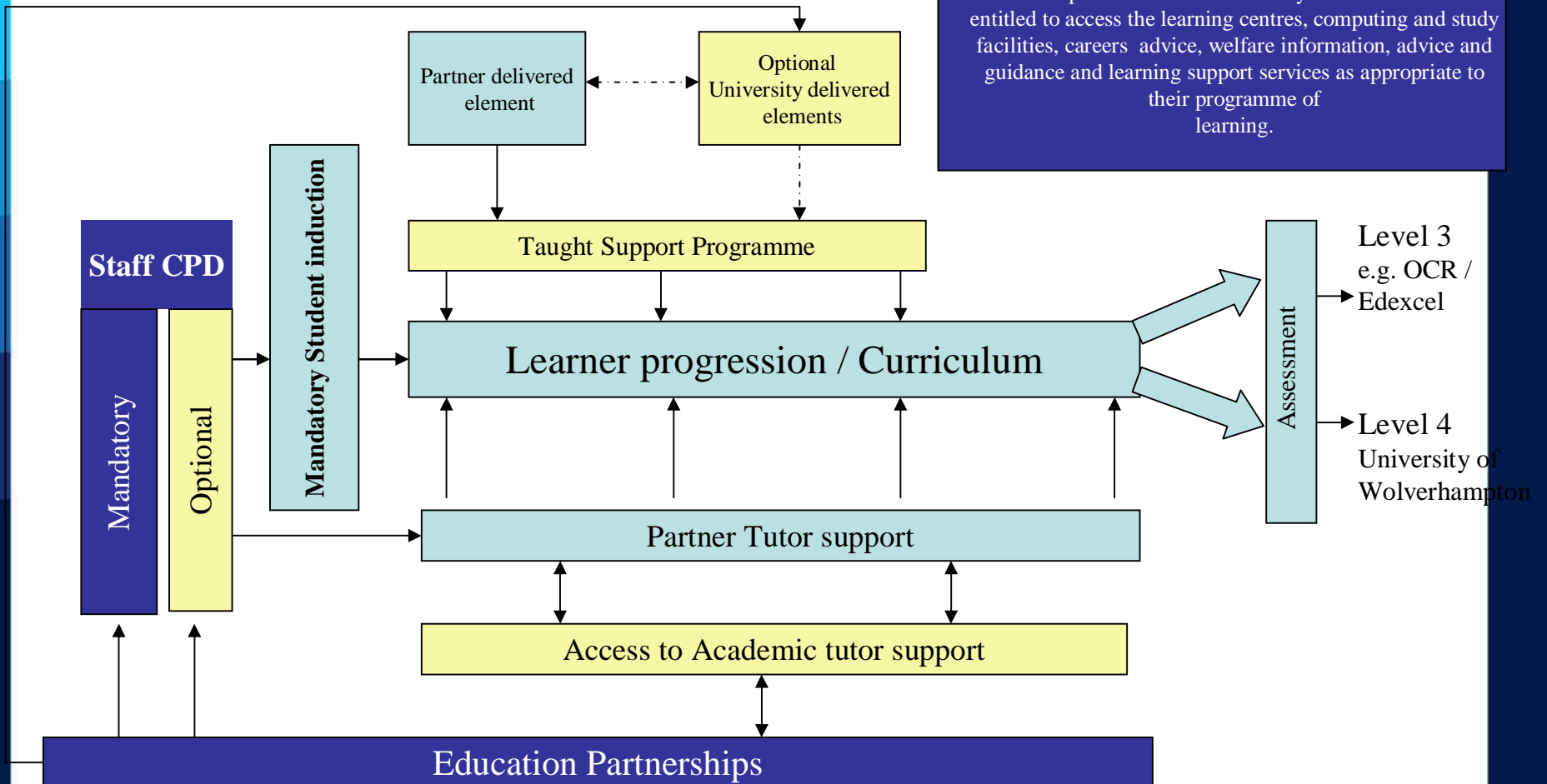
- EPQ: level 3 qualification modelled on in-depth independent research and study
 - experience of **deeper study** than is possible at A-level
 - an opportunity to **explore a specialised topic**, eg medical research, politics or astronomy, that is closer to their preferred university courses
 - **confidence** to work independently and creatively
 - practice in **essay writing** and independent **research**.
- 23 students involved in support programme with University
- Collaboratively developed and delivered by the University and the Academy

Throughout the process, students must record all the stages of their project, in their AQA Production Log, including how their ideas and product developed.

- **Start of the Project:** students choose a topic, with support from their supervisor. It could be an extension to one of the subjects they're already studying or something that interests them.
- Students **draft a title** and agree the aims with their supervisor.
- **Project approval review** – supervisor and student
- **Plan their Project:** students decide where to start their research, how to develop the topic and what form of product they will create. They can produce a research report, an artefact (eg piece of art, computer game or realised design) or a production (eg a charity or sporting event, or a play).
- **Planning review** – supervisor and student
- Students **research their chosen topic** – as well as looking at obvious sources such as the internet and books, students can ask an expert in their chosen field or arrange work experience in a relevant trade.
- **Mid-project review** – supervisor and student
- Students **carry out their plan** and prepare their product. Look critically at their research and, if necessary, revise their ideas. Make final decisions on the product and the format their presentation might take.
- **End-of-project review** – supervisor and student
- Finally, students should reflect on the success of their Project overall.

(AQA <http://www.aqa.org.uk/qualifications/projects/the-project-process.php>)

HEMiS 'Extended Project'



Associate Student Status

Student is provided with a University email account and is entitled to access the learning centres, computing and study facilities, careers advice, welfare information, advice and guidance and learning support services as appropriate to their programme of learning.

Transition research

- Work with academies and other partner schools in the region
- Investigate longitudinally the impact of any involvement with the university
- Impact on retention (stay-on) rates and attainment
 - Early indications show that both retention and attainment rates are positively impacted upon (Harnisch, Taylor-Murison, 2010)
- Impact on progression rates into HE and success in HE
 - About two-thirds of withdrawals happen during the or at the end of the first year (Yorke, 2000)
- Draw on large data sets with opportunities for in-depth qualitative research
- Investigate transition strategies across phases and educational interfaces

References

- Briggs, S.; Pritchett, N. (2010) *A comparison of staff perceptions and student experiences of issues associated with university study*. Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education
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- Johnston, B. *The First Year at University. Teaching Students in Transition*. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Education
- Yorke, M. (2000) *Smoothing the Transition into Higher Education: What can be learned from Student Non-completion*. Journal of Institutional research, 9(1): 35-47.