



## ***Bridging the Gap***



### **Project report on student transition funded by Newcastle University**

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| <b>CONTENTS</b>                                             |                |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
|                                                             |                |
| <b>Introduction</b>                                         | <b>Page 3</b>  |
| <b>Project outcomes</b>                                     | <b>Page 5</b>  |
| <b>Database of induction provision</b>                      | <b>Page 6</b>  |
| <b>Outcomes of project launch workshop</b>                  | <b>Page 13</b> |
| <b>'Paving the Way' report for dissemination conference</b> | <b>Page 17</b> |
| <b>Presentation material from dissemination conference</b>  | <b>Page 27</b> |
| <b>Artwork from dissemination conference</b>                | <b>Page 31</b> |
| <b>Case studies</b>                                         | <b>Page 35</b> |
| <b>Case study 1 PARTNERS programme</b>                      | <b>Page 36</b> |
| <b>Case study 2 VETNET LLN North East</b>                   | <b>Page 39</b> |
| <b>Case study 3 Chemistry: RSC Teacher Fellowship</b>       | <b>Page 44</b> |
| <b>Case Study 4 Speech and Language Sciences</b>            | <b>Page 47</b> |
| <b>Conclusions</b>                                          | <b>Page 60</b> |

## **Introduction**

The Bridging the Gap project has the following aims.

- Increased knowledge of the secondary and higher education environment and better knowledge of what student expectations are (e.g. study into pre-entry expectations; opportunities for Newcastle lecturers to meet secondary school teachers and share knowledge)
- Increased knowledge of both how school students learn and what they learn.

It is a cross-Faculty project, with outcomes of benefit to all Faculties. Transition issues, with the resultant satisfaction and retention of students, are a current focus across the University; this project is designed to promote wider understanding of these issues and to enable strategies to address them.

The Research Centre for Learning and Teaching (CfLaT), within the Education Section of ECLS, has led the project, supported by Northumberland Local Authority and the following sections of the University: the Marketing and Communications Directorate, the Speech and Language Sciences Section of ECLS, the School of Chemistry and the School of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

## **Approach**

An initial element of the project was the synthesis of knowledge already held about students in transition, and the impact of programmes to support them. Details of 18 Newcastle University programmes were reported to the project, from which four were chosen for more detailed case study: PARTNERS, VETNET LLN North East, the RSC Teacher Fellowship in Chemistry, and Speech and Language Sciences.

To increase our knowledge of student expectations and experiences, fresh data were collected by interview from Northumberland school applicants, from college applicants in NE colleges and from school and college staff, by questionnaire and interview with students post-entry who have experienced pre-entry or extended induction programmes, and by interview with key members of University staff. A total of 87 students and 15 staff in schools and colleges, together with 26 students and 4 staff within the University, were involved in this part of the study.

## **Outputs**

1. An Initial cross-University survey produced a database of the 18 induction programmes which were reported to us.
2. The project launch workshop disseminated the results of the initial survey, and collated perceptions of what was known by delegates about student transition to university.
3. A dissemination conference was held at Woodhorn Colliery, Northumberland, attended by school students and staff from Northumberland schools and Local Authority and representatives from the Newcastle University case studies. The data collected through visits to schools and colleges in the North East are analysed and presented in the 'Paving the Way' report, presented at the dissemination conference.

4. The Powerpoint presentation from this event offers probing questions for students and staff about transition provision, and it has already been adapted for a further partnership event.
5. The group discussions at the dissemination conference were captured in the form of artwork, some of which is illustrated here.
6. The data collected in four case studies within the University are presented here as case reports. A further, more detailed, report has been prepared for the Speech and Language Sciences Section of ECLS.
7. The overall conclusions and recommendations from the project are presented at the end of this report.
8. The collated outputs of the project will be available in the near future on the following website: <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/cflat/Bridgingthegap>

It was hoped to capture both school and college students and current university students on video during the project. However, students were reluctant to be filmed, and the video output is small.

It was not possible, during the lifetime of the project, to arrange learning walks to enable university, school and college staff to understand each other's environments better. However, the details of contacts in the schools and colleges visited will be passed to the Newcastle University PARTNERS team, together with the project funding allocated for this purpose, so that walks can be arranged during 2009-10.

## **Project Outputs**

### **1. Database of induction provision**

Information collated from University-wide survey carried out in January 2009

| Contact details                                                                    | School/Dept/Service    | Nature of Transition activity                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Description of Transition activity                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Moira Bent<br><a href="mailto:moira.bent@ncl.ac.uk">moira.bent@ncl.ac.uk</a>       | Library                | Survey as part of National Teaching Fellowship to discover perceptions of information literacy in the transition to HE. Resulted in contacts in 7 schools in Co Durham and subsequent plans for development of info lit activities with schools | So far piloted in 1 school. Member of library staff worked with teacher and school librarian to run info lit workshops in school.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Sara Bird<br><a href="mailto:Sara.bird@ncl.ac.uk">Sara.bird@ncl.ac.uk</a>          | Robinson Library       | Liaison and Support of local schools and teachers                                                                                                                                                                                               | Visits to Robinson Library from local schools by 6 <sup>th</sup> from students in support of their studies. This can be subject specific, e.g. History, Geography, English, Science, etc or more general for the new qualification EPQ or information literacy. Sessions involve tour of the library, explanation and taught session on searching the catalogue, provision of ICT facilities or teaching room.                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Colin Bryson<br><a href="mailto:colin.bryson@ncl.ac.uk">colin.bryson@ncl.ac.uk</a> | Combined Studies, HaSS | Enhancement project coupled with QE of the degree in general                                                                                                                                                                                    | The project has three elements:<br><ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Listening to the student voice to gain a better insight into what students perceive is working well, the issues that need to be addressed and how they should be addressed.</li> <li>2. Making a series of interventions through formal (and more informal) mechanisms to enhance transition towards stronger engagement with academic and learning communities.</li> <li>3. Evaluation of these interventions, particularly with a view to expanding across the faculty and university.</li> </ol> |

| Contact details                                                                                      | School/Dept/Service                                                  | Nature of Transition activity                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Description of Transition activity                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Stuart Challinor<br><a href="mailto:stuart.challinor@ncl.ac.uk">stuart.challinor@ncl.ac.uk</a>       | AFRD                                                                 | Year 11 Business Masterclass                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 10.00 Meet the team: Stuart Challinor and Baxter Fenwick 10.00 The Business Environment: Stuart Challinor. The macro-environment: The Political environment ; The Economic environment ; The Social and cultural environment ; The Technological environment; The Ecological environment ; The micro-environment: Customers, Suppliers, Distributors, Stakeholders                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Dr Catherine Douglas<br><a href="mailto:catherine.douglas@ncl.ac.uk">catherine.douglas@ncl.ac.uk</a> | VETNET LLN (hosted by Newcastle University) / AFRD / Maths and Stats | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Extended induction</li> <li>2. Peer Assisted Learning</li> <li>3. Animal Maths</li> <li>4. Stage 3 Animal Health Conference</li> <li>5. Animal Uni</li> <li>6 and 7. Information, Advice and Guidance DVDs</li> <li>8. College open day</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Extended induction - to address integration of students who live away from university accommodation and may have an impoverished social experience.</li> <li>2. Peer Assisted Learning - Stage 2 students supporting stage one.</li> <li>3. Fun.* Animal Maths - to contextualise and apply maths to the animal and veterinary related subjects.</li> <li>4. Stage 3 Animal Health Conference - this has been opened up as an additional opportunity on the HE "open day/experience HE" calendar.</li> <li>5. Animal Uni - the first summer school for vocational learners.</li> <li>6. IAG (information, advice and guidance) DVD aimed at vocational learners studying animal qualifications at level 3.</li> <li>7. IAG (information, advice and guidance) DVD aimed at work-based / mature learners studying or who have studied animal qualifications at level 3.</li> <li>8. Pre-application vocational learners college open day.</li> </ol> |

| Contact details                                                                                             | School/Dept/Service                | Nature of Transition activity                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Description of Transition activity                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Dr Bill Foster<br>Teaching Fellow<br><a href="mailto:w.h.foster@ncl.ac.uk">w.h.foster@ncl.ac.uk</a>         | School of Mathematics & Statistics | <p>One of the major problems that many students face on entering University is the level of maths &amp; stats as well as numeracy expected in the first year of their degree course and in many cases there is a gap in their background or skills. If this gap is not addressed immediately at Newcastle, or even better before coming to University, any skill, knowledge or application deficiency has serious consequences on engagement, retention and the level of degree attained.</p> <p>For the purposes of this report we split transition into two operational areas. The third section discusses the use of computer based methods aiding transition.</p> | <p>The following is a list of current and planned activities in this area:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Developing online and other material in consultation with schools and colleges to support the teaching of maths and numeracy at the appropriate levels.</li> <li>2. Influencing student decision making by supplying support from Newcastle University via outreach activities linked directly into their A level or Diploma studies.</li> <li>3. Supplying extra material to students coming to Newcastle so that they are better prepared. Some disciplines already supply their new entrants with information and booklets on the background expected.</li> </ol> |
| Dr J Glassey,<br><a href="mailto:Jarka.glassey@ncl.ac.uk">Jarka.glassey@ncl.ac.uk</a> ,<br>CEAM, Merz Court | CEAM + Library                     | Introduction to Chemical engineering                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <p>The first teaching week of the first semester in Stage 1 is dedicated to this project. It starts by a welcome to the school and an overview of different chem. eng. careers and is followed by the statement of the design problem that student groups have to solve within the next 3 weeks.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |

| Contact details                                                                       | School/Dept/Service                   | Nature of Transition activity                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Description of Transition activity                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Iain Harris<br><a href="mailto:iain.harris@ncl.ac.uk">iain.harris@ncl.ac.uk</a>       | HaSS Faculty Office                   | Post Application Open Days                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Information about the school, staff, course with optional advice on finance, welfare and tours of campus/accommodation forming part of the day. I imagine a lot of the details on this activity will be provided by schools as my role is limited to suggesting good practise in PAOD's, and delivery of Accommodation Tours. Whether this merits being categorised as transition activity is questionable, there is certainly scope is to include more.                                                                                      |
| Peter Hopkins<br><a href="mailto:peter.hopkins@ncl.ac.uk">peter.hopkins@ncl.ac.uk</a> | GPS                                   | The transition to university: the experiences of students living at home                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | At the moment, the focus is upon the transition from school to university; however, we hope to extend the project to include the transition through university as well.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Tina Huddart<br><a href="mailto:tina.huddart@ncl.ac.uk">tina.huddart@ncl.ac.uk</a>    | Agriculture, Food & Rural Development | "Buddies" - we assign a buddy to new Stage 1 students. When Induction Pack information is sent out at the start of September - buddies i.e. students who have been contacted over the summer who have given us their permission to include their e-mail address in the induction information. | Buddies and new Stage 1 students during Induction Week are bought together in a lunch to chat. We tried something different this year (only because of the volume of Stage 1 students in this degree programme) and we got all the buddies and other select students to stand up and give a 5 minute informal presentation on what it was like for them adjusting to University life, social aspects and study. We also include our own "transition" sheet of things you are most likely to encounter first day, first week, first month etc. |

| Contact details                                                                      | School/Dept/Service                     | Nature of Transition activity                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Description of Transition activity                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Mark Jackson<br><a href="mailto:m.p.c.jackson@ncl.ac.uk">m.p.c.jackson@ncl.ac.uk</a> | Historical Studies                      | Transition from School to University: Archaeology SH and JH Students The Archaeology Team has made a number of changes in recent years to help with the Transition to University. We continue to develop this important area but here are some of the areas we have developed                  | The Archaeology staff have made a number of significant changes which are important for helping students to adjust to University life. They include the facilitation of the building of relationships between students quickly and for providing venues for students to meet informally and formally with academic staff. As well as engaging students quickly in exciting ways to study the subject of archaeology which most would not have encountered before. |
| Dr John Lazarus<br><a href="mailto:j.lazarus@ncl.ac.uk">j.lazarus@ncl.ac.uk</a>      | Institute of Neuroscience               | Setting Language Research to Music Widening participation project familiarising secondary school students with HE.                                                                                                                                                                             | Students from local secondary schools worked for several months, in two successive years, with Newcastle University MA and PhD linguistics students, Newcastle University staff, and a composer, on ideas for music pieces based on babies experience of discovering language. John Lazarus contributed an animal communication workshop.                                                                                                                         |
| Dr Carolyn Letts<br><a href="mailto:c.a.letts@ncl.ac.uk">c.a.letts@ncl.ac.uk</a>     | ECLS/SLS                                | Extended induction to help stage 1 students with transition, focusing on self-directed learning and writing assignments.                                                                                                                                                                       | Induction extended beyond induction week throughout semester 1. Includes group tutorials and presentations on using the library effectively and essay writing.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Sara Marsham<br><a href="mailto:sara.marsham@ncl.ac.uk">sara.marsham@ncl.ac.uk</a>   | School of Marine Science and Technology | Easing transition: A proposed learning forum to facilitate the enhancement of A-level and undergraduate student experience. A cross-institutional undergraduate-led scientific conference in marine biology allowing undergraduate students to present their own research to an audience of A- | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A-level students will gain experience of assessment methods used as part of degree programmes.</li> <li>2. The format of the scientific conference will dispel common perceptions that degree level science is difficult to understand.</li> <li>3. Undergraduate experience of presenting at scientific conferences will be enhanced via</li> </ol>                                                                    |

| Contact details                                                                                       | School/Dept/Service                                         | Nature of Transition activity                                                                      | Description of Transition activity                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                       |                                                             | level students interested in science degrees.                                                      | participation in 10 minute oral presentations.                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Professor S McHanwell<br><a href="mailto:stephen.mchanwell@ncl.ac.uk">stephen.mchanwell@ncl.ac.uk</a> | Dental Sciences                                             | Student seminars on reactions to Stage 1                                                           | Holding a series of focus group sessions discussing student perceptions of their first term in Newcastle.                                                                                                                                           |
| Dr Dawn Noble<br><a href="mailto:dawn.noble@nth.nhs.uk">dawn.noble@nth.nhs.uk</a>                     | University Hospital of Hartlepool                           | Work experience time offered to sixth form students interested in medicine as a career possibility | The sixth form students have had an opportunity to discuss with the existing medical students regarding university life and experience as a medical student including study time, work commitment, hours of study and leisure activities available. |
| Ruth O'Rourke<br><a href="mailto:r.f.o'rourke@ncl.ac.uk">r.f.o'rourke@ncl.ac.uk</a>                   | Modern Languages                                            | Pathways: Tackling Transition Together                                                             | Two meetings at Newcastle. A starter and a plenary. There are also learning walkways in operation between staff. This is a consortium project and involves staff from Durham and UNN.                                                               |
| Anna Reid<br><a href="mailto:anna.reid@ncl.ac.uk">anna.reid@ncl.ac.uk</a>                             | ECLS/KTP project with Bedlingtonshire Community High School | Induction of Key Stage 3 student researchers                                                       | 'Transition' in the sense that we are attempting to investigate students' understanding of learning in their from role as young people who go to school to student researchers with the potential for considerable impact on our project's outcomes |

| Contact details                                                                                                                                         | School/Dept/Service               | Nature of Transition activity                                                                    | Description of Transition activity                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Patrick Rosenkranz, School of Psychology, 4 <sup>th</sup> Floor Ridley Building, <a href="mailto:p.m.rosenkranz@ncl.ac.uk">p.m.rosenkranz@ncl.ac.uk</a> | Psychology<br>Biomedical Sciences | Mentoring, Monitoring and Motivating: a tool set to assist the transition to university learning | Biomedical Sciences aims to provide first year students in the two Schools with more structured support to help in their transition to University learning.<br><br><ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A mentoring scheme will be established in the two Schools.</li> <li>2. Attendance of students at selected classes will be monitored.</li> <li>3. The phase advisers/stage coordinator will also monitor student achievement in course work.</li> </ol> |

## 2. Outcomes of project launch workshop

The launch workshop for the project was held in the University's Research Beehive on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2009. Admission tutors and staff with liaison responsibilities for admission and induction were invited, together with a partner from Northumberland Local Authority. Many of those present had contributed to the database above, and all had valuable current experience to contribute to the project. The workshop disseminated the knowledge gained from the database, together with the work of PARTNERS. Delegates then addressed the key questions indicated in the feedback below.

### What do we know / don't know about incoming students?

We don't know very much – we have many assumptions

We assume

- Students are used to IT
- They have subject knowledge – varies from exam board/school
- Things about learning styles

We know they have met entry requirements: we know their qualifications

We know some background details of students:

- socio economic factors
- previous education/school etc
- disabilities/diversity
- previous / no previous Uni experience in family

We don't know what they have studied or how they have studied

School learning /teaching experience are an unknown (and so varied)

For International Students there is a big cultural difference.

We perceive a gap between the skills they have and those needed at Uni; e.g. critical thinking/writing

For A Level students there is a big gap in ways students learn, between school and Uni

Not fully equipped for self managed learning (hand holding in school / college)

A Levels are not necessarily a good indicator of student potential

We know students often come from smaller learning groups than they have at Uni

An increasing number live at home

More students now have to have a part time job; this has implications for study.

We don't know what students bring to Uni.

Motivation for going to university varies greatly

- So many different reasons
- Not one size fits all

Expectations among incoming students can be far too low and too high

They may have apprehensions / misconceptions / feel intimidated

## What do we want to know?

### Big Questions

- How do students learn?
- What are the barriers?
- Don't need anything new?
- How can we fix what is already there?

### We want to know

- What helps you learn and what are the barriers to learning (to the students in schools.)
- What kinds of information do you use to help you with your studies (e.g. use of technology) (to the students in schools.)
- Current students – What do you remember from your induction?  
What did you learn/what can the Uni do to improve: to enable you to settle in?
- Info about the students , eg motivations, personal circumstances
- How well does the personal tutor system work? (for school and Uni students) / Are they aware of what the personal tutor is there for?
- Staff: how much training do you get as a personal tutor?

| <u>Prospective Students</u>                                                                  | <u>Current Students</u>                                                    |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| What are you worried about – peers?                                                          | How did you feel on arriving at Uni?                                       |
| What helps you learn and what are the barriers to learning?                                  | Info about the students:<br>e.g. motivations; personal circumstances       |
| What are you looking forward to?                                                             | Do you know where to go for.....?<br>Do you know what to do if.....?       |
| What kinds of information do you use to help you with your studies? (e.g. use of technology) | What is your preferred medium for information?<br>Or combination of media? |
|                                                                                              | What do you remember from your induction?                                  |

|  |                                                                                                                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | What did you learn/what can the Uni do to improve it to enable you to settle in?                                                      |
|  | How well does the personal tutor system work? (for school and Uni students) / Are they aware of what the personal tutor is there for? |
|  | For staff: how much training do you get as a personal tutor?                                                                          |

Questions to internal / external Staff:

- How can we join up all the transition related work that goes on?
- Do we feedback our efforts, and their improvements to the student body?
- How can we better the process?

Communicate

- Make existing systems work properly
- Share student related practices/concerns

### What works/doesn't work to support transition?

| <b>Works</b>                                                                                        | <b>Doesn't Work</b>                                                                                                            |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Experienced support                                                                                 | University Timetable                                                                                                           |
| Shadowing/pre-entry activity                                                                        | - not user friendly                                                                                                            |
| Weekly tutorials with the same tutor                                                                | Registration                                                                                                                   |
| Peer mentoring/access to students (students going into their old schools.)                          | Finance pre-entry students can't access resources e.g. internal stud. Mature stud.                                             |
| Internal communication + joined up thinking                                                         | Physical Estate<br>Access for disabled students                                                                                |
| Making students <u>feel welcome</u><br>Work with parents, teachers, careers advisers as influencers | Campus management!                                                                                                             |
| <b><u>Would work</u></b><br>Careful planning of induction/schedule                                  | The geography of the place works against support: hard to achieve.<br>A sense of belonging.<br>Hard to create a <u>culture</u> |
| Interviewing pre-entry                                                                              |                                                                                                                                |
| Academic families – peer support<br>Yr 3 → Yr 2 → Yr 1                                              | Depersonalised approach<br>To – Registration<br>Timetabling                                                                    |
| Societies                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                |
| A good induction process                                                                            | Over induct – during induction week                                                                                            |

|                                                                                                     |                                                 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                     | Too much info too early – not retained          |
| Spread ‘induction’ out , dripping in info                                                           | Student welfare not available in induction week |
| Using previous PARTNERS students to plan induction, including delivery of some sessions themselves. | Outreach – can be hard to talk to mentor        |
| 2 day event with staff + students (as in Archaeology)                                               |                                                 |
| Peer mentoring<br>Students mentor students<br>Can be structured (or not)                            |                                                 |
| Teaching starting from Induction Week                                                               |                                                 |
| Lot of early formative feedback                                                                     |                                                 |
| Reassurance of early feedback                                                                       |                                                 |

**Key issues:**

- Communication with incoming / aspirant students and their teachers
- Supportive contact between current and incoming students
- Design of induction activity – initial and extended
- Design of personal tutor system, and support for personal tutors
- Importance of early feedback on progress

### **3. 'Paving the Way' report for dissemination conference**

The dissemination conference for the project was combined with the dissemination of research by Northumberland school students on 'The perfect 6<sup>th</sup> form.' It was held at Woodhorn Colliery on 6<sup>th</sup> July 2009 and was subsidised by ALCAN, Northumberland Local Authority and Newcastle University. Three outputs are presented from this conference, the first of which is the summary report based upon field visits to schools and colleges in the North East. Groups of prospective University students in four schools and four colleges were interviewed about their transition needs and experiences, and interviews were held with staff members responsible strategically and operationally for student transition to university.

**Paving the way**  
**Student conference, Northumberland**  
**July 6<sup>th</sup> 2009**



**Report of the *Bridging the Gap* project on student transition  
funded by Newcastle University**

**Project team:**

**Ann Briggs**

**Jill Clark**

**Ian Hall**

**With the support of**

**Claire King**

**Gemma McBride**



## **Student transition to university**

Transition is a bridge between the security and structure offered by the school and the risks of life. (Will, 1984, p. 2)<sup>1</sup>

The Newcastle University 'Bridging the gap' project investigated the transition needs and experiences of young and mature applicants to University, and examined the transition and induction programmes provided in four areas of the University.

In the project we considered:

Students' experience of transition events, support and guidance

Their concerns about university entry / experience

What engages / excites them about university

How preparation can address concerns and increase engagement

We also investigated:

Students' current preferred modes of learning / teaching

Their expectations of university learning experience

How to bridge the gap

This report focuses upon the experiences related to the project team by students and staff in four Northumberland schools and in four North Eastern colleges. It also draws upon the experience of the Newcastle University PARTNERS programme, which was one of the four University programmes investigated as case studies.

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<sup>1</sup> Will, M. (1984). OSERS programming for the transition of youth with disabilities: Bridges from school to working life. Washington, DC: Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Department of Education.

## **The current context**

In the schools, colleges and university departments visited, the needs of students in transition are taken seriously. There are strong links between North Eastern schools and colleges and North Eastern Universities, and some schools and colleges have active relationships with universities outside the region, particularly the more Northern universities and Oxford and Cambridge. The initial project conference within the university, and project visits to schools and colleges, indicate that although some strong transition schemes are supporting students well, and some networks are being used to a full extent, there are still areas of ignorance on the part of schools, colleges and universities about each other's provision, which could be more strongly addressed. Responses from students in transition also indicate that communication with them and for them could be better planned and co-ordinated, to maximise the positive effect of what is provided. This report indicates what good practice is in place, offers ways of understanding the process of transition, and indicates what can be built upon the current foundations.

## **What are student needs?**

Life transition of any kind is stressful. However well we may be able to imagine what lies ahead, nothing prepares us fully for the lived experience of transition. However, stress can be lessened, and aspiration enhanced, if we have good access to information and support. Much of the guidance offered about university transition is generic, and is offered to groups of potential applicants, but an important learning outcome of the project is that applicants' needs differ greatly, and effective support has to be individualised to some extent. Students need:

- Awareness-raising as to why they should consider university application
- Support for their self-belief: their aspiration to apply, study and succeed
- A range of 'taster' experiences which enables them to imagine life at university
- A sound programme of support and guidance through the application process
- Practical information, for example about finance, transport and housing, university attendance and assessment processes
- A continuing programme of orientation and practical support on arrival at university

The section below draws upon school and college student and staff experience to identify good practice.

## **What makes a difference?**

### **Start early!**

Colleges generally have two years to prepare students for university entry, and schools have much longer. Some Northumberland schools have programmes which start in Year 9, or earlier, and the experience of the University of the First Age shows that primary school children can respond well to an introduction to the university environment. It is noticeable that in some schools, the respective endpoints for students - academic, vocational, university, non university - are identified very early on, by year 7. It can then be very difficult for students to identify with the aspirations of a different set of students at the school, and to believe in their own ability to achieve. Programmes designed to raise aspiration, to enable students to visualise themselves as university students in the future, include visits to schools by university students and staff, but importantly also involve visits to campus by young people, where they can engage in activities with students and staff on site.

### **Clear coherent preparation programme**

All schools and colleges visited have a programme of preparation for university entry, which typically starts in Y11 in schools, and at the college application stage for college students. But not all students understand what is being offered, when and why. Changes in staffing in some schools mean that students in Y12 and Y13 are being offered something different from their older or younger peers, and they do not see coherence in the overall programme. Publishing the whole programme of support and opportunities (with indicative dates where these are not fully known), and making this known to students from Y11 onwards increases student confidence in the support they receive.

The published programme needs to be supplemented with good communication routes to alert students to up-coming guidance opportunities, UCAS application deadlines and to the opportunity to attend off-site events

### **Consistency of staffing**

Some schools have a 'rolling programme' of year tutors and co-ordinators, which means that the role of supporting Y12 / 13 students has to be learned afresh each year. In colleges, changing roles and responsibilities among staff may lead to similar problems. Whilst many students express sympathy for someone new in role, and many staff express frustration at the system they are in, this approach to support for university entry detracts significantly from its effectiveness. The most confident students and staff were found in schools and colleges where the staff involved in transition have a deep fund of knowledge and experience, combined with a wide personal network of contacts with universities and relevant agencies. At the other extreme are students who feel that their needs are not high on the organisation's agenda, where staffing support is not trusted to be knowledgeable, and where their own expectations of success are diminished by the experience they encounter.

### **Enthusiasm and encouragement**

The positive effect on applicants of significant encounters with school, college and university staff, students and others who are enthusiastic and encouraging cannot be underestimated. Students tell of one-off encounters with students or staff on university visit days, or of longer-standing relationships with subject teachers or guidance workers which have 'tipped the balance' for them and enabled them to imagine themselves as university students. This helps to sustain the personal self-belief and ambition which enables them to overcome the practical hurdles of transition.

### **Access to a range of opportunities**

The schools and colleges visited have access to a range of opportunities which are offered to all their Y12 / 13 students, and there are examples where attendance at some of the events is compulsory. These opportunities are further discussed below under 'What kinds of transition experience are on offer?' and include:

- Guidance events for both students and parents
- Programme of support for application and transition through tutorials
- HE roadshows offered on a regional basis or at own school / college
- Visits to their school / college by university staff / students
- Assemblies to discuss university related issues (not popular with our respondents)
- Generic university Open Days, both across the North East and more widely
- Subject-specific visits / interviews in university departments
- Summer schools and other residential university experience
- Student shadowing

It is very noticeable that in some schools and colleges, students are willing to seek out access to university Open Days and other events as individuals, and also take responsibility for finding information themselves about courses, finance and accommodation. Their school or college encourages them to do this, and in some cases supports them with funding for visits. In other cases, some students say they are aware of opportunities such as Open Days, but they are 'too far,' 'in the holidays,' 'at the weekend,' 'in school time,' or that they got round to applying for them too late. It is important that school and college tutors build student confidence in independent action, and offer official encouragement for students to prioritise such opportunities.

### **Individual attention**

Mature students in colleges particularly welcome access to guidance from staff in college and in university who address their individual circumstances. This can include consideration of the practicalities of travel, childcare and their entitlement to financial support alongside receipt of benefits or wages. Information about their expected first year timetable, and the timing and nature

of assessment requirements is also essential to their decision about where and how to attend university.

This kind of information would greatly help all incoming students. Students of any age need to know whether they can balance study with work to supplement their income, where they can live and be able to get to university on time, and what kind of assessment regime they will be involved in.

### **Identifying with the process**

Students of all ages in the transition project say how they have welcomed, or would welcome, one-to-one time with 'someone like me.' As well as accessing the practical information (which is often lacking), they need ways of gaining the confidence that 'someone like me' can manage the difficulties of transition and university attendance, enjoy and succeed – and personal anecdotal advice as to how it can be done.

Students who have had access to student shadowing, or similar one-to-one sharing of university life with current students, have particularly benefited from the experience. Those with siblings or close friends who have been through university application and attendance also feel that they have sources of up-to-date personal advice and support. Applicants whose parents attended university generally feel supported by them, although they understand that their parents' experience of university may be out-dated. What is important is having parents who understand and engage with the university application process, especially regarding application for finance. Guidance events for parents are therefore appreciated, and the opportunity to sit with a parent at the computer at home with application materials and 'work it all out together.'

### **Learning independently**

When asked about their learning experiences at school and at college, most students say that they have a range of learning experiences, from whole-group teaching and note-taking led by a teacher, through group discussion or investigation, to independent study. Different students have different learning preferences, although there was general liking for learning in small groups where the contact with the teacher is felt to be more individual and personal. Most students perceive that they will have to learn more independently at university: whilst all have heard of lectures, and are expecting to be in large lecture groups, there is a lack of knowledge and understanding about seminars, lab classes, field trips, small-group work and individual tutorials. Some students look forward to learning more independently, and feel that they are developing the necessary skills. Most are concerned about achieving the balance of time for study and working for assessment with time for other aspects of university or family life. Living independently (for those who choose to study away from home) is often seen as a bigger challenge than studying independently, with finance at the top of most students' 'worry list,' and some respondents wish that they could access life-skills classes at school or college. Data from another project indicates that the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme may be useful in this respect.

## **Learning at university**

'The lecture' is the big unknown for many of our respondents. They understand what it might entail, but have difficulty imagining themselves in this learning environment. Some who have been on campus visits are disappointed that they have 'only been shown' a lecture theatre, but have not attended a lecture. Others, mainly those on student shadowing experience or summer schools, have experienced lectures – either 'real' ones, or ones put on specially for the visitors. Simply attending either kind of lecture seems to offer genuine support and relief. Most say that they enjoyed the experience; most say that they now understand what it entails, and that the nervousness about lectures has gone.

Even allowing for the fact that time spent in timetabled activity at university varies greatly between courses, there is great disparity between students as to what their expectations are of study time in any particular week. Some, on seeing four hours of lectures on the timetable, assume that they are free of study for the rest of the week. On the whole, the mature students have a more realistic work ethic than their younger counterparts. A clear indication from universities of expectations about attendance, private study and working for assessment would be helpful for all students.

## **What kinds of transition experience are on offer?**

From the work we have undertaken, there appear to be three types of transition activity available to students in schools and colleges.

Firstly, there are ***generic transition activities***. These are activities or resources which are aimed at encouraging students to go to university in the first place, or are aimed at raising aspirations of young people that university really is an option for them. These tend to be school or college driven, often begin quite early (i.e. before years 11 and 12) and are centred upon visits to roadshows, exhibitions or university, or visits from university students and staff. Visits are fairly generic in that potential students would get a guided tour of the campus, student union, library, and other facilities. They may get to see a lecture theatre but not necessarily attend a lecture, and general financial information is also included. These activities would not involve parents (if appropriate) directly.

Secondly, there are ***focused transition activities***. These are activities or resources which are aimed at students who are in their final years of school or college, who may still be unsure about actually going to university, but who have ideas of what they might study (and perhaps where) if they do go. These tend to be university driven, are concentrated in the final year of school or college and are much more geared towards actual experience. Examples would be the PARTNERS bite-size uni, where students can live as a student for a week, other residential programmes, student shadowing, and student ambassadors. Such focused transition activities are usually subject-specific, and so a potential student wanting to study medicine would experience very different activities from one aiming to study psychology, for example. Attending actual lectures is more usual and some activities would involve parents (where appropriate) directly.

Finally, there are ***pedagogical transition activities***. These are activities which are usually additional to the focused transition activities. They are normally university led, are subject-specific and are aimed at offering potential students a *real* taste of university life from a pedagogical perspective. Attendance at an actual lecture, seminar, or tutorial group would be a part of the transition activity, with a focus on university level study skills and independent learning. Access students in colleges may find that study skills courses are compulsory, with a focus on independent learning. Again, these transition activities are subject-specific and there are huge variances as to what is on offer to some students and not others. Some activities will include access to module descriptions, examples of types of assignments, and assessment criteria.

Some relationships between university and school or college, such as the Newcastle University PARTNERS scheme, encompass all three types of activity.

|                             | <b><i>Generic transition activities</i></b>                   | <b><i>Focused transition activities</i></b>                                                                     | <b><i>Pedagogical transition activities</i></b>                                 |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Aims</b>                 | To encourage and raise aspirations of University as an option | To encourage those still unsure but who have ideas of what they might study                                     | To offer a <i>real</i> taste of university life from a pedagogical perspective. |
| <b>Led by</b>               | School/College                                                | University more generically                                                                                     | University more subject specific                                                |
| <b>Age range</b>            | Year 4 upwards                                                | Years 11 / 12                                                                                                   | Years 12 / 13                                                                   |
| <b>Experience</b>           | Visits, tours                                                 | Residential experiences, tours, contact with other students                                                     | Lectures, discussions, tutorials, assignment outlines                           |
| <b>Parental involvement</b> | No                                                            | Yes                                                                                                             | No                                                                              |
| <b>Project examples</b>     | HE roadshows, open days, visits to schools/colleges           | Bitesize Uni, medical student-shadowing, students doing their own activities with friends already at University | Northumbria conference, College study skills programmes for access students     |

## **Recommendations**

### **To universities**

- Engage on a departmental basis with local schools and colleges. Make sure that at least one person in each department understands the learning skills and needs of applicants, and disseminates this knowledge. Engagement with younger students as well as applicants is important.
- Recognise that there are different 'types' of transition/induction activities and attempt to offer as many as possible, covering the range of generic, focused and pedagogical activity.
- View transition as a longitudinal, gradual, 'drip, drip' effect which is focussed on different potential students at different times according to their different needs.
- Engage with and encourage parents of potential university students from as early on as possible.
- Report back to local schools and colleges when their students have graduated.

### **To schools and colleges**

- Appoint a designated, key individual who has overall responsibility for HE awareness-raising and for the application process. This person (and their team) would regularly 'push' individual students (from years 11 onwards) to particular transition activities such as open days, student shadowing or roadshows, and would oversee and monitor the UCAS application process.
- Publish the programme of support for university application, and update as necessary. Offer specific advice and activities at crucial times, such as advice on financial planning at a time before applications for funding support are due in – but not so early so that the information is 'lost' and is meaningless. Seek feedback from current applicants to revise the schedule and the types of information offered for future students.
- Encourage students (whilst maintaining support) to be proactive in their preparation for university, and to become increasingly independent in relation to their learning and study skills.
- Engage with and encourage parents of potential university students from as early on as possible.

### **To students**

- Be proactive and take increased responsibility for your own transition. Attend any activities and take any advice wherever possible. This can be both formal (open days, etc.) and informal (advice from siblings or friends) or a combination of the two.
- Believe in yourself!

#### 4. 'Paving the Way' presentation for dissemination conference

The presentation for the conference was based upon the project report. It posed critical questions about transition to student applicants and to school / college / university staff. These offered a framework for discussion and for the creation of artwork, as indicated on the slides and the worksheet below.

Slides 1 / 2

**Paving the way**

**What's the journey?**



**What makes a difference?**

- ❖ Start early!
- ❖ Clear preparation programme
- ❖ Consistent staffing
- ❖ Enthusiasm and encouragement
- ❖ Access to a range of opportunities
- ❖ Individual attention
- ❖ Identifying with the process
- ❖ Learning independently
- ❖ Learning at university

Slides 3 / 4

**Start early!**



When did you start thinking about university?  
How early do you start preparing students for university entry?

**Clear preparation programme**

When did your school /college programme for university entry start? When it started, did you know what was involved?



How clear and consistent is the support for university entry?

Slides 5 / 6

**Consistency of staffing**



Were you helped by experienced tutors and guidance workers?

How well trained and well informed are staff dealing with transition?



**Enthusiasm and encouragement**



Who inspired and encouraged you to apply for university?

What strategies are in place to inspire and encourage?



Slides 7 / 8

**Access to a range of opportunities**




How many different ways have you found out about life at university? Which ones helped you most?

What range of opportunities do you offer to students to find out about university life and study?




**Individual attention**




Have you been able to spend time with individual students or staff to talk through your own circumstances?

What opportunities do you offer for 1-1 contact for applicants with students and staff?



Slide 9 /10

**Identifying with the process**



How have you been helped to imagine yourself at University?

What real-life opportunities are offered of university life?




**What helps my journey?**

- ✓ Awareness-raising as to the possibility of applying to University: where does this start?
- ✓ Support for self-belief: what affects my aspiration to apply, study and succeed
- ✓ Accessing 'taster' experiences which enables me to imagine life at university
- ✓ Support and guidance through the application process
- ✓ Gaining practical information, for example about finance, transport and housing, university attendance and assessment processes
- ✓ Continuing help with orientation and practical support on arrival at university

Slide 11

**Reflecting on the journey**

Use the 'reflecting on the journey' sheet in any way you wish, to enable your group to discuss the issues we have raised, and other issues which are important to transition. You are not expected to answer all the questions – they are prompts for discussion. Enable the artists to work with you, to express your reflections.

## Reflecting on the journey

### Practical questions

|                                                                                                                      |                                                                 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| When did you start thinking about university?                                                                        | How early do you start preparing students for university entry? |
| When did your school /college programme for university entry start? When it started, did you know what was involved? | How clear and consistent is the support for university entry?   |
| Were you helped by experienced tutors and                                                                            | How well trained and well informed are staff                    |

|                                                                                                            |                                                                                                   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| guidance workers?                                                                                          | dealing with transition?                                                                          |
| Who inspired and encouraged you to apply for university?                                                   | What strategies are in place to inspire and encourage?                                            |
| How many different ways have you found out about life at university? Which ones helped you most?           | What range of opportunities do you offer to students to find out about university life and study? |
| Have you been able to spend time with individual students or staff to talk through your own circumstances? | What opportunities do you offer for 1-1 contact for applicants with students and staff?           |
| How have you been helped to imagine yourself at University?                                                | What real-life opportunities are offered of university life?                                      |

### Reflective questions

Everybody's journey is different; there can be group journeys or individual journeys  
What's important to me?

There can be multiple – and perhaps meandering – paths; journeys will not always necessarily lead to the same place, e.g., University course, gap year, volunteering, work placements, further training.

Where am I going?

How do I know where to go?

Who's guiding me?

What's involved in the journey?

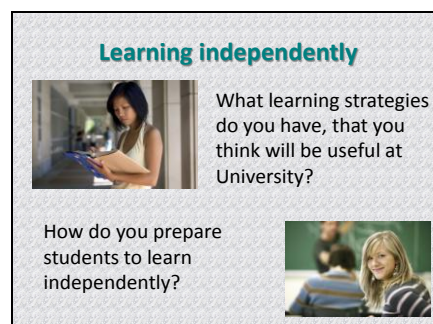
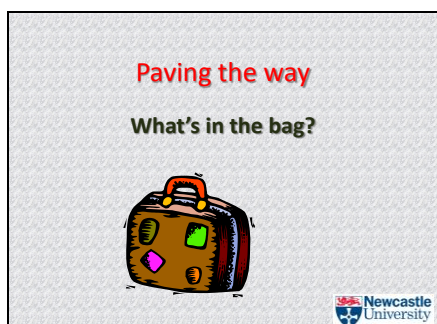
What's important for me?

How do I feel about the journey?

What factors influence my thoughts and actions?

Are there key destination points along the way?  
What are they?

Slides 12/ 13



**Learning at university**



How will you adapt to learning and living at university? What will support you?

How do we prepare and support new students through transition?

**What's in the bag?**

Use the discussion time to brainstorm a huge number of items to go in the student's bag  
Include items which the student has  
Include items provided (or which could be provided) by the school, college or university  
Work with the artists to represent your ideas

**Fill up that bag!**

## 5. 'Paving the Way' artwork

At the dissemination conference, the artist, Frank Creber, worked with delegates to represent the discussion. Below is a selection of photos of the artwork.









## **6. Case studies**

From the initial survey of transition / induction experiences within Newcastle University, four case studies were chosen:

Newcastle University PARTNERS programme

VETNET LLN North East

RSC Teacher Fellowship in Chemistry

Speech and Language Sciences

For the case studies, students were surveyed by questionnaire, and a small number were interviewed. Key members of staff were interviewed, and contributed to the final case study report. In the case of Speech and Language Sciences, a more detailed survey was carried out, at the request of SLS.

## 6.1 Case Study 1 Newcastle University PARTNERS programme

### Background

Established in 2000, the PARTNERS programme is a University-wide scheme which offers two routes into Newcastle University:

- A Supported Entry Route to enable students to receive a special conditional offer from the University that is *lower* than the typical offer for a degree programme at Newcastle University; and
- The Guaranteed Offer Scheme which gives students a guaranteed conditional offer, at the typical entrance requirement level for the degree programme(s) they have applied for.

### Aims and Objectives

PARTNERS aims to support and encourage students who have the potential to succeed at Newcastle University. Working closely with 108 PARTNERS schools and colleges throughout the northern region, PARTNERS provides opportunities and support for students who may be thinking of applying to university. As a result of this working relationship, and the events and activities that PARTNERS provides, the aim is to:

- raise awareness of higher education among students
- identify and develop students' potential
- help students make the transition from school and college into Newcastle University

### Linking schools, colleges and Universities

The PARTNERS scheme run a huge variety of events and activities for students in primary schools, Years 10, 11, 12 and 13 (and college equivalent), and for parents/carers. These are designed to help students find out more about university life and study. There are now over 108 PARTNERS schools and colleges, which geographically includes the whole of the North East region, and extends to Cumbria and West Yorkshire. PARTNERS offer a full calendar of events and activities throughout the year which include:

- Apprentice students on campus for Years 5 and 6 and their parents
- Aiming for college education for Year 10 students
- Student guide to student life and Masterclasses (Year 11)
- Talks; summer campus tours; Bitesize Uni; Student shadowing (Year 12)
- PARTNERS Talks; Making the transition; information evenings; pre-summer school tutorials, and Assessed Summer School (Year 13)

- Specific events such as Choices Together (for Looked After Children in Years 10 and 11); conference for parents (Years 11 to 13); information update conference on HE for teachers/tutors/advisers.

The Bitesize Uni programme, for example, runs over the course of one week, and there are 300 places - 20 are Vetnet (see Case Study 3) specific, 100 of them are subject specific in the areas of Chemistry (see Case Study 1), Earth Sciences, Biology, and the remaining 180 places are generic. Students are put into groups of about 10, and with two student ambassadors, and the aim is to give them the student perspective as well throughout the whole week. They do three subject taster sessions, (chosen in advance) and four HE study skills sessions. They have a whole social programme, e.g. 'eat out on a budget' and they stay in halls of residence. Students also go on an employer visit.

### **Exploring impact**

The design of the programme is that all events are building blocks on each other, so a student can do everything over the years and they will always get the progressive level of information. So, for example, finance might be covered in every one of their events, but it is always at the appropriate level for that age group. Several students reported very positive experiences of the variety of activities on offer- a combination of which they attended over a period of time - in our questionnaire survey:

*We had talks from people from the PARTNERS scheme at Newcastle university, we went on a school trip to an Edinburgh university open day, I took part in subject day activities at Newcastle university, and also went to PARTNERS open days and student shadowing events. I also took part in the PARTNERS assessed summer school. The Partners summer school helped to make me feel like I was already at university, it gave people the chance to experience student life to the full, and even stay in halls of residence if necessary.[student 1]*

*College provided visits from alumni currently at Uni, inviting them to give advice on the best way to adapt. Also attended a "Summer School" to help get used to Uni. The advice from students prepared me for what to expect and the summer school oriented and used to the university system. [student 2]*

Our visits to schools and colleges yielded very positive comments and reactions to the PARTNERS programme from almost everybody we spoke to. Staff (particularly in schools) spoke at length about the established relationship they had with PARTNERS and how it played an integral part of their work with students in Year 12. One member of staff illustrated this perfectly:

*I've got students on the Partners Scheme for Architecture and I work very closely with them because it's, I don't think....when you measure up a lot of the other Universities, we're very lucky that we have one that's very supportive of our local students. I've got very strong ties with them and always have done. I think that's about it. But we do, it's actively encouraged from the beginning of Year 12.*

Another school gave an example of the usefulness of the PARTNERS programme in relation to their own support for transition activities, especially with their work on finance:

*The PARTNERS come and do two talks, they do a talk, which is a general one, about HE and they do one about Finance as well. We follow it up with more discussion about finance, because that's what the parents want to know about. The parents want to know about the money side of things more than anything else. And the students want to know a bit about how to live on a budget but they're not really that fussed about where the money's coming from in the first place. They're far more free and easy about the loan situation than parents are.*

Many students we spoke to during our fieldwork spoke at length about their involvement in the PARTNERS programme, from student shadowing, to the summer schools, the Bitesize Uni and the visits to the University. One particular Year 12 student recalled his experience of the 5 day (4 night) Bite Size Uni:

*It was really good. I wasn't sure I wanted to go to University until I went on that ... You actually got your own room, independent living really ... It was really good, .... we did lots of lectures and activities. We went bowling and to the Metro Centre.*

Such a response was not uncommon in our fieldwork, the reaction to PARTNERS, and in particular the residential activities, had undoubtedly made an impact on the students we spoke to.

## **Conclusions**

The PARTNERS programme is clearly an example of a multi-faceted approach to the issue of outreach, transition, induction, and preparation for University life. Students can participate in as many, or few activities as they please, other than those which are linked to their offer such as the Assessed Summer Schools. Some activities fall into the 'generic' category where students can visit the University generally, others are tailored to specific subjects and some contain a pedagogical element to them which enable potential students to experience different learning situations and styles.

## **What makes a difference?**

- PARTNERS is a good example of a programme which offers a *range* of activities and opportunities, from generic to individualised support.
- It offers 'real' experiences of University life, from the practical (living in halls) to the pedagogical (teaching experiences).
- Parents are encouraged to participate, and there are specific activities where this can happen.
- PARTNERS aims to support those students who, for a variety of reasons, may have not considered University as a realistic option.

## 6.2 Case Study 2 VETNET LLN North East

### Background

VETNET LLN (Lifelong Learning Network) is a national network (funded by HEFCE) of veterinary schools, Universities and colleges committed to providing opportunities for students on vocational courses to get into higher education. The North East & Yorkshire Region – the focus of this case study - is managed by Dr. Catherine Douglas at the School of Agriculture, Food & Rural Development at Newcastle University.

### Aims and Objectives

The overall purpose of VETNET LLN is to support student transition, improve student success and experience at HE (from under-represented Widening Participation groups), and reduce attrition. More specifically, VETNET LLN aims to:

1. Produce a comprehensive qualification map to clarify existing animal and veterinary related courses available across the country,
2. Develop, through work with institutions, curriculum that will allow vocational learners to progress smoothly into veterinary and applied animal related degree courses,
3. Compile a catalogue of career and professional development opportunities for those working in the animal and veterinary sectors.

As a national network, VETNET LLN is working with institutions to establish progression accords. These clarify routes of progression for learners within and between institutions. Work is focused particularly at the FE/HE interface but will also include the assessment of work place experience as a valid means of entry to HE study.

### Linking schools, colleges and Universities

A strong tenet throughout the work of the VETNET LLN is the links it has to partner colleges, schools and universities. Each region has its own partners, and in the North East and Yorkshire, Newcastle University is the regional hub institution. Current partners include: Askham Bryan College; Bishop Burton College; Calderdale College; Craven College, Skipton; East Durham College; Kirklees College; University of Leeds; Newcastle College; Northumberland College (Kirkley Hall); Norton College; Leeds City College; Tong High School; University of Edinburgh and University of Glasgow.

Within the VETNET LLN North East and Yorkshire region, the following activities (among others) are available or being piloted:

- **Residential University experiences (aspiration raising and assessment for entry).** In 2009 three residential taster events took place. The two during the Easter vacation were

specifically for students on level 3 vocational programmes (eg BTEC National Diploma in animal-related subjects) who are interested in studying veterinary subjects at University. The residential experience was designed to give students an overview of the subject and application process, but was also by way of an assessment as those who successfully completed the Easter Schools (as assessed by the veterinary lecturers) will be guaranteed an interview in the next UCAS application round. The summer school at Newcastle University was an aspiration/confidence raising experience for students on a wider variety of level 3 animal-related vocational programmes (eg BTEC National Diploma/ City and Guilds Advanced National Certificate). Along with information on the application procedure, living as a residential university student, it provided an opportunity to explore different subjects through taster sessions.

- **Cave website.** Designed by VETNET LLN this website (Courses in Animal and Veterinary Education) contains a comprehensive database of courses available to potential students, with student profiles, career information and pathways into specific animal-related careers, and informed advice service. It is a vocationally focused added-value, one-stop-shop, UCAS-type site, serving all the applied animal-related courses at institutions across the country.
- **VETNET LLN Focus groups. To survey cohorts of vocational learners to inform general student support / subject specific support to ease transition to HE study.**
- **Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG).** A DVD aimed at vocational learners studying animal qualifications at level 3 (also to be available for parents) and a second DVD aimed at work-based/mature learners studying or who have studied animal qualifications at level 3.
- **Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) or support staff and subject specialist staff at level 3.** Admissions staff from relevant animal-degree programmes have been meeting with personal tutors at local feeder colleges to give advice on the application procedure and build working relationships to open up the lines of communication. Subject specialists from the local feeder colleges have also shadowed some of the first few lectures biochemistry. This subject has been highlighted as difficult in focus groups. Although the lecturer offers additional tutorials, the FE staff are knowable to adapt the emphasis of their curriculum to better prepare students who are likely to progress to HE, some colleges are now running additional tutorials for students.
- **Monitoring student progress the progression accords.** Progression accords are signed between FE and HE institutions to clarify the entry requirements for vocational learners and demonstrate that their qualifications are welcomed. An element of the progression accord is the good practice of monitoring the students once they matriculate. This has been built into the Animal teaching groups regular review meetings. Whereas before problems were only flagged up after exam results in January, lecturers can share information on students earlier and identify trends across modules which may suggest a student may be “at risk” (assessing grades and patterns of late or no submission), mechanisms can then be devised to support the student well in advance of exams.
- **Animal health conference.** This Stage 3 conference has been opened up as an additional opportunity on the HE "open day/experience HE" calendar. Several regional (and national) feeder colleges have invited their students to participate in an event that supports their studies but also gives them an insight into HE in their subject of interest.

- **Pre-application open day.** This differed from typical university/school open days to focus on vocational learners' needs and supporting their tutors in providing HE information, advice and guidance in synchrony with their timetable of tutorials. The day involved talks and activities and quizzes around finance, HE, UCAS, student talks about a range of animal-related subjects, visits to halls of residence, a lunch to chat to current students about a range of animal related courses available, visit to the farm (which also supported current assignments).
- **Specific transition-related projects.** (see below).

### Exploring impact

Specific transition-related projects have been undertaken in this Case study: this work supports the under-represented widening participation group of 'vocational learners' (those who have not taken 'A' levels) and includes:

- **Extended induction.** With the aim of integrating students who live away from University accommodation and who may have an impoverished social experience, this included study skills sessions, and residential study trips with small group projects to enhance course identity. This small group of students are traditionally taught in large interdisciplinary lectures, which limits the opportunity to integrate and bond with their subject peers.
- **Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL) project.** As an alternative strategy to large lectures to support transition and support the development of HE study skills of stage 1 students. Stage 2 students support those at Stage 1, the aim being to establish an informal support network.
- **Improving numeracy competencies** of students entering HE – an interactive contextualised IT resource for animal disciplines "**Animal Maths**" contextualises and apply maths to the animal and veterinary related subjects. This resource has a number of uses once in HE, but the primary rationale was to support transition of students moving from further education to higher education who may only have achieved the equivalent of basic GCSE. Lecturers can use this to allow HE candidates to study and improve at their own pace.
- **Animal Uni.** Bolted on to the PARTNERS (see Case Study 2) Bitesize Uni residential summer school – *Animal Uni* – students can find out more about the various animal-related courses available at university, as well as meeting new people and finding out what it is really like to be a university student. This project in 2008 was the first summer school for vocational learners (it has been successfully completed in 2009 with more colleges participating).

Although we were unable to collect fresh data from VETNET participants, there is a growing body of evidence of impact which is starting to emerge. Data is being gathered for the Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) project and the Extended Induction project through questionnaire feedback, focus groups, student marks in exams or relevant assignments. Initial feedback for Extended Induction has been excellent - scoring highest on the University Induction Activities feedback. Student bonding on the course is reported to be much improved on previous years, and student attrition is reported to be significantly less than previous years.

Animal Uni (vocational summer school) has been well received by both students and lecturers who wouldn't usually consider HE as a progression route. As the VETNET Regional Manager reported:

*We are dealing with students across a spectrum of aspiration: at one end we have students who may anticipate HE as the next step, their parents/siblings may have gone to university, and progression has always been an option or expectation for them, although the numbers of these students tend to be less in this widening participation cohort [vocational learners]. At the other end of the spectrum are those students for whom HE has never been on theirs/their family/lectures' radar. It is these students who may have ruled out HE with no knowledge of what it entails or the benefits it could confer and they may not consider themselves capable or indeed able to "fit in". It is these students we hope to capture with activities such as Animal Uni, so that they have an informed choice. Animal Uni is addressing the above for the learner and filtering back to their families and colleges.*

The residential experience does appear to work well for the VETNET students, and the school is being run again this year. Lecturers of the students who have attended have not only seen students who were not considering HE to apply, an increase in motivation and improvements through the UCAS process but also an improvement in current academic effort and attainment. Due to the success of this "strand" in Bitesize Uni, a STEM version is being run this year.

## **Conclusions**

The VETNET LLN programme is clearly an example of a multi-faceted approach to the issue of outreach, transition, induction, and preparation for University life, with a specific remit for vocational and/or Widening Participation learners. It links effectively with existing transition activities such as the PARTNERS programme. Some activities fall loosely into the 'generic' category where students can visit the University generally, but are always specifically focused towards animal-based courses.

## **What makes a difference?**

- VETNET LLN initiated and funded activities within Animal Science are a good example of an initiative which offers a programme of activities and opportunities, from generic to individualised support.
- It offers 'real' experiences of University life, from the practical (living in halls) to the pedagogical (teaching experiences).
- It links effectively to other programmes, such as the PARTNERS programmes, and adds to these rather than duplicates or competes.
- VETNET LLN aims to support those students who, for a variety of reasons, may have not considered University as a realistic option, and who may not take the 'traditional' route into University.
- The alignment of the level 3 course linked so closely to the degree subject, with large cohorts of potential HE students locally, mean that working in partnership with local feeder colleges to support transition could be a very effective method for recruitment and enhanced retention, compared to the University's central generic engagement with schools offering a wide variety of A levels with students aspiring to a diverse range of subjects at an array of universities across the country.

- These widening participation vocational students have committed their interest to their specialist subject 2 years ahead of most A level students. By adjusting the initial HE curriculum to be more applied even if limited to a small tailor-made transition “add-on”, this will enthuse these learners and assist with retention. Focusing some teaching on these students’ interests in stage 1 of their HE experience, rather than providing a purely academic foundation for future applied study, will enhance their HE experience, support their transition by minimising disillusionment with the subject choice and thus reduce attrition. This model is being adopted in the veterinary curriculum. This pilot within Animal Science forms a workable model within the university’s restrictive timetabling which promotes large-group, interdisciplinary, lecture-style, generic-principle teaching on many first year programmes, which can be an alien and uninteresting pedagogic experience compared to the applied teaching, that these work-place students are used to.

## 6.3 Case Study 3      Chemistry: RSC Teacher Fellowship

### Background

This activity is led by Dr Peter Hoare, an RSC (Royal Society of Chemistry) Teacher Fellow working in the School of Chemistry at Newcastle University, funded through the RSC project "Chemistry for Our Future" (CFOF) for the academic year 2008-2009. Dr Hoare is an experienced Chemistry teacher (20 years in teaching) on secondment from a local secondary school and is one of three current RSC Fellows nationally. He was appointed following both a "letter of intent to host a Teacher Fellowship" written and sent to the RSC by Dr Lee Higham, the current Outreach Director, and a competitive national interview and appointment process - the School of Chemistry had a vision to both widen and embed their already wide-ranging Outreach programme and also to demonstrate to the University that with suitable staffing such a post would be very beneficial to the both School and the University in the longer term.

### Aims and Objectives

There are four main aims of the RSC Teacher Fellowship project:

1. To develop strategies for bridging the gap between school and university chemistry courses, both in terms of content and practical experience.
2. To improve academics' knowledge of the content of A Level chemistry and GCSE science courses, current teaching practices in schools, the types and range of pedagogy used and the capabilities of incoming undergraduates.
3. To raise awareness amongst teachers – and students, their parents and guardians – of what it is like to study chemistry at university, the benefits of higher education and the career options available to chemical science graduates.
4. To develop sustainable links between schools and universities.

### Linking schools, colleges and Universities

A major focus of this transition activity is the 'outreach' work and by the end of the research, the project formally linked the University with a total of almost 1000 students from Years 12 and 13 from many schools and colleges across the region, covering institutions as far South as Middlesbrough, Ashington to the North and Hexham to the West. In addition, the project has links with Northumbria University (and their RSC Teacher Fellow) with the jointly developed and delivered

“Chemistry in Your Shopping Basket” presentation which targets Years 5-8 students, an initiative designed to show students that Chemistry impacts on every aspect of our daily lives and which has been seen by over 1000 students this summer, ranging from reception year up to year 9.

Dr. Hoare’s work this year built upon and added to an already wide ranging and very successful Outreach programme in the School of Chemistry, described as “outstanding” by the School’s ISR report in October 2008. Many other features of the programme focus on specific year groups and sometimes younger students, including:

- Spectroscopy tours for A level students
- Laboratory sessions
- RSC annual schools quiz and Salter’s Festival (Years 9-11)
- Links with the Newcastle University PARTNERS (undergraduates) and Bitesize Uni. schemes
- Chemistry summer schools for Year 12’s
- Chemistry Masterclasses within the ‘Aim Higher’ scheme.

### Exploring impact

During the time of the RSC Fellowship, school contacts and links with the University for 6<sup>th</sup> formers alone have quadrupled, (from 250 students up to 1000 students) as a result of successful efforts made by the Fellow through his contribution towards the Outreach work:

*We do Outreach just for the sake of doing Outreach, and not overtly as a recruitment tool, because it promotes Chemistry and our thinking is if every University was doing it, if every Chemistry department was doing that, then perhaps kids’ll come here for a visit and then say “I’d like to do Chemistry” but maybe they’ll apply to Bristol or Imperial or Durham or Manchester or wherever, but if all those Universities are doing the same hopefully some students might go to an Outreach activity in Manchester or York and think “this was good, I’d like to do Chemistry, I’ll apply to Newcastle”..... (RSC Fellow)*

However, rather than being seen as ‘just’ Outreach, there are clear links to transition and benefits to students and Universities:

*I think there’s a transition element in that [Outreach] because it’s pre-transition if you like. If you get them [the students] enthused and you can up-skill them in terms of the practical skills and so on while they’re still at school that’ll obviously benefit whichever University, hopefully it’s our University, they end up in. (RSC Fellow)*

The RSC Fellowship case study is an example of a transition activity which focuses on the pedagogical aspect of studying chemistry. Lab sessions on offer at the University to A level students offer practicals which are Stage 1 level (first year undergraduate level), but linked to the content of the major A-level specifications, so students actually experience University level teaching, learning and sometimes assessment. Indeed, Dr. Hoare has introduced what has proved to be a very successful and popular event for year 12 students entitled “What’s it Like to Study Chemistry at Newcastle?”,

experienced by over 300 local students in June/July 2009 which provided a whole day experience, including two lectures, a problem-solving workshop and a laboratory session.

In our questionnaire survey, one student told us:

*We had some introductory lectures for my subject, which went through what was to be expected of us during the year. We were also given some laboratory equipment and a book voucher to purchase course textbooks. [Student 1]*

Another student described how multiple transition activities (both school-based and university-based) helped her understanding of university life:

*With school: UCAS visit day to the University of Kent which was more of an options/finance day so did not really tell what uni life was about. Privately: medlink and medsim, at the University of Nottingham, which were really good as I got to do sample lectures, practical work (both medicine related) and also stayed in halls which all in all gave a good idea of uni life. [Student 2]*

## **Conclusions**

Having an individual solely responsible for the operational aspect of outreach and transition activities such as the RSC Fellowship appears to be key to the success of the programme. The Fellow had no teaching responsibilities within the School of Chemistry, and so has a clear remit. However, continuation of the post, and therefore building on the work undertaken during the Fellowship, is dependent on securing funding once the RSC Fellowship funding ends on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2009.

## **What makes a difference?**

- The RSC Fellowship and the outreach and transition work achieved within this remit is a good example of a programme of activities which is particularly subject-specific, but at the same time is generic in that it aims to raise aspirations and the profile of science generally.
- It also has the view that such activities must start early, and involves work with an increasing number of schools and a wide age-range.
- Some of the transition work is generic (visits to the University) whereas others have a clear pedagogical focus and explore teaching and learning within the University setting.

## 6.4 Case Study 4      **Speech and Language Sciences**

### *Background*

This report provides an overview of the findings from a study of the School of Speech and Language Science's Student Induction programme. The focus on the Speech and Language Sciences Induction programme was part of a wider investigation into the nature of transition from school and college to university. The project, Bridging the Gap, was funded by Newcastle University to explore the range of transition activities operating within educational institutions across the North-East of England. Findings are based on data drawn from the University wide survey, an interview with the DPD Speech and Language Sciences and the survey administered to the Speech and Language students. Speech and Language Sciences at Newcastle University is one of the leading teaching and research units in the UK devoted to the study of normal communicative processes and communication disorders in children and adults. The School of Speech and Language offers two degree programmes that lead to a qualification as a Speech and Language Therapist:

1. BSc (Hons) Speech & Language Sciences (4 years, full-time)
2. MSc Language Pathology (2 years, full-time)

These programmes are recognised by the UK's Health Professions Council and the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists. These programmes were awarded the highest grade possible in several recent external reviews of teaching. Most recently, the BSc (Hons) Speech and Language Sciences was rated in the National Student Survey 2009 as the best Speech and Language Therapy course in the UK.

The School of Speech and Language also offers two postgraduate degree programmes in research training:

1. MPhil
2. PhD Speech & Language Sciences

### **Aims and Objectives**

The aim of the Speech and Language Sciences (SLS) induction programme, according to the Degree programme Director (DPD) is to:

“Ease transition and anxiety around the first year of the SLS course, especially around writing assignments and organising study”. (Survey Data)

The Speech and Language Induction programme comprises a 'standard' and 'extended' programme of activities. The 'standard' programme is normally offered during Freshers' week and includes:

- Introduction to the BSc Stage 1 Speech and Language course
- An opportunity to meet stage 4 students
- Introduction to the School computing facilities
- A tour of the Walton library (medical)
- An introduction to clinical education.

The 'extended' elements of the induction programme are offered, with the exception of the initial group meetings with tutors, after induction week. The purpose of the extended induction activities was to:

“Help stage 1 students with transition, focusing on self-directed learning and writing assignments”. (Survey data)

The extended induction includes the following activities:

- Using the library effectively
- Writing essays (under exam- and non exam-conditions)
- A group meeting with course tutors at the end of induction week
- Two further group meetings with course tutors between the end of induction week and the end of the autumn term.

### **Exploring impact**

Did the induction activities help to ease transition and develop students' independent and self-directed learning? It may only be possible to answer these questions through recourse to longer-term data such as student assessments. However, looking at the results of the survey in general terms, it seems that the various induction activities offered were in the main viewed as helpful by most of the survey respondents. We can only speculate as to whether or not the findings were generally the same for non-respondents. A larger response rate may have resulted in data that are more conclusive. The data from the student survey are presented below in order to show how they felt about their induction experiences. Student ratings of specific induction activities are presented in writing simply to save space. Charts are presented in the appendices to the main report.

#### *The Standard Induction*

*Students were asked: How helpful was the introduction to the BSc Speech and Language?* Thirteen responded to this question. Nine of the students felt the introduction had been moderately helpful while one thought it had been very helpful.

Twelve of the students provided additional written comments and practically all of these were positive about this aspect of the induction, focusing specifically on the importance of meeting other students and staff as in the following two comments:

*Meeting some staff members and fellow students, a good way to meet those from your halls on the same course.*

*Meeting our tutor was helpful during the semester as we were able to discuss any issues we had.*

Or just to get an overview of the course itself:

*Introductory lesson giving out booklets, info etc. This was helpful so we knew what we would be doing in the first week. Also gave us a chance to get to know other students.*

*Answered many of my questions and lay down the foundations for the rest of the course. Got to know a few of my class mates.*

Students were asked if they found any aspects of the course introduction unhelpful. Again, the opportunity to interact more with their peers on the course and those outside in the wider university seem to be key points:

*The introduction to the course was interesting and I enjoyed getting to know some of the people on the course however, feel it would have been a better ice breaker had we switched around and got to know a few more of those on our course - I only spoke to two on the first day and with living at home, would liked to have spoken to a few more people. I think this would have helped me settle in better in Freshers' week.*

Another student felt that some sort of team building exercise might have been helpful:

*Spoke one on one to class mates, larger groups may have been better for introductions perhaps through a group task/ team building exercise.*

Stepping outside the actual course itself was also viewed as important as the following comment suggests:

*I thought that there were too many lectures meaning that we did not have the opportunity to partake in the activities provided during Freshers' week and meet new people. I also thought that many of the lectures were pointless to help introduce me to the course and I found them quite unhelpful*

Clearly, one felt the acute need for some sort of refresher course in physiology and anatomy:

*It not so much that there were UNHELPFUL elements, but the program could have been more helpful. The introduction to the BSc was good but it didn't prepare me for what was*

*coming! I think I did my course research pretty well before coming to Uni and was not aware of all the elements of the course, or at least the importance of some. In particular, students who had not done the sciences at school or had been away from education for some time were not at all prepared for the physiology or anatomy aspects of the course. Perhaps there could be some introduction to/refresher short course in the induction week - we didn't do that much so I'm sure there would be time.*

It seems that two elements emerge from the comments here: the importance of meeting students generally during Freshers' week but also specifically those on the same course. Interaction on both levels is necessary to help students settle in. However, it seems that the induction activities may clash with the other social elements offered during Freshers' week.

*Students were asked: How helpful was the opportunity to meet stage 4 students?*

Twelve students rated the opportunity to meet stage 4 students. Eight viewed the experience as moderately helpful, two rated it as very helpful, one slightly helpful and one not at all helpful.

Most students found this aspect of their induction positive and helpful as the following comments suggest:

*Useful to hear how they found the first year, they were able to answer our questions and give us reassurance, definitely an element which should be kept for following years.*

One respondent felt it might have been more useful to meet up with stage 2 students:

*It was good to hear from some people with first-hand experience but maybe speaking to some second years would have been more beneficial. The fourth years didn't seem to remember their first year that clearly.*

In terms of negative aspects of meeting stage 4 students, one student felt that:

*Meeting the stage 4 students (only the 2 reps) was more of them chatting to us about the course and then us asking questions. To be honest, we didn't really know what questions to ask at that stage. It would have been much better to have had a social event of some sorts - even just coffee - with the stage 2 students who had just gone through first year. Question and answers are fine but we had no idea what was before us so didn't really know what to ask.*

Another felt that:

*Didn't really get much information. Also may have been more helpful to do this at the open day rather than the induction to the course as many of my initial questions I had to research and thus already had answers before starting the course.*

*Students were asked: How helpful was the Introduction to the School's computing facilities*

The introduction comprised a short talk from one of the School's Technical Support Officers about email, using computer and department facilities. The purpose of the introduction was to "flag up what facilities are available including those specific to the section or likely to be used while on this particular course". Students were shown how to "access lists of resources and information on booking, etc".

Six found the experience moderately helpful, four found it slightly helpful and two found it not at all helpful.

Students felt that the introduction to the school's computing facilities was in the main helpful as the following comments suggest:

*A good general introduction and quite informative*

*Quite helpful, particularly learning how to use the library site.*

Negative comments focused on the timing of the introduction,

*Should have been given earlier as this occurred after the induction week.*

This student felt that the introduction should have taken place earlier claiming it took place after induction week when it actually took place on day 1 of induction week. The student may have confused the School's introduction to computing facilities with one laid on by the Information, Systems and Services Department of Newcastle University after induction week. There are clearly a number of induction activities for students, which may result in confusion when it comes to remembering and evaluating each one of them.

Other students were critical of the duration of the event claiming it:

*Was very brief*

*Perhaps too long*

Technical problems,

*The introduction to the computing facilities was a carry-on. Even though I had already gone through the password changing process online, the system had a paddy and refused to recognise me. The person taking the session had no idea how to rectify this so I spent the whole time waiting in the IT support place getting it sorted.*

And the need for handouts:

*A handout of the slides should have been given.*

*They could have printed out notes as I forgot most of what I learned so was a bit stuck when I needed help.*

Overall, the introduction seems to have been useful, but comments suggest that the event needs a bit of fine-tuning to make it more helpful.

*Students were asked: How helpful was the tour of the Walton library (medical)*

Opinion seems a little more divided about the library tour with five students rating it as moderately helpful, four slightly helpful, two very helpful, and one finding it not at all helpful.

Students found the tour interesting and informative, as the following comments suggest:

*The lady was informative about the services at the library*

*Visited relevant parts of the library to our course, had to visit photocopying areas, look for books etc.*

*I have never really had to use a library like that before and it was nice to have it explained to me*

However, it seems that many of the students felt the 'tour' was a 'talk' rather than a tour and would have actually preferred the tour.

*Not so much a tour but a talk, however a tour wasn't really needed.*

*We were given a quiz and had to fill it in by ourselves. I think it would have been more helpful if someone had given us a tour and shown us how to use the facilities, as I was confused about a few things and had to ask my peers.*

*It wasn't a tour rather a talk therefore we were none the wiser where anything was in the library however we were told the services that are offered.*

It may be the case that students, in answering this particular question, may have confused it with an earlier session in the Robinson Library offered during Freshers' Week. Clearly, this highlights the importance of getting feedback about induction activities as soon as possible after the event.

Some students felt that the tour was too short:

*A very, very, short session and was not worth it.*

*Most of the things explained you would have to do for yourself to get a better understanding of*

On the whole, the tour of the library appears to have been useful in the superficial sense of showing them where it is. There seems to be a suggestion that a more interactive, hands on session might have been more useful.

*Students were asked: How helpful was the introduction to clinical education.*

Seven of the students found the introduction moderately helpful, four slightly helpful and two very helpful.

*Interesting to find out what we would be learning in this module, and the placements we would have this year and following years.*

*The intro to Clin Ed was good. If we had had a presentation like that for every module we would have been much more prepared for our first lecture - just what we would be learning and what we needed to bring.*

However, some also found it to be unnecessary:

*Possibly not necessary as clinical education sessions followed giving more information.*

*Wasn't really necessary as everything was explained in first clinical education lesson.*

*Probably not necessary, went a bit too slow at the beginning of term then there was a rush of information towards the end.*

*Apart from the above I did not find out anything else that I did not already know or which was helpful to know before starting the course.*

While the introduction appears to have been viewed as useful and informative, there seems to be an issue around whether the same information may be available from later formal sessions.

### **The Extended Induction**

*Students were asked: How helpful was the 'Using the Library Effectively' session?*

Four students found the session slightly helpful, Three students found it moderately helpful, two found it very helpful and two found it not at all helpful.

Positive aspects about the 'using the library effectively' session include:

*Good introduction to the library, got used to the facilities and made it easier when returning on own.*

*It was good to get into the library and feel that we had some idea where we were going to find relevant texts*

*Hands on experience of using the library and learning organisation.*

Negative aspects of using the Library effectively:

*It was a little late in the term so I knew already what was being taught*

*It wasn't very helpful because by the time we had this session, most of us had had to teach ourselves how to use the library*

*Some parts were pointless and it did not include some things that I think are important such as how to rent out group rooms and how to activate the internet on your laptop in the library*

*How helpful to you personally was the 'Writing Essays under exam and non-exam conditions' session?*

Five of the students found this session moderately helpful, three found it slightly helpful, one found it very helpful and one found it not at all helpful.

Students identified some positive aspects of the session including:

*Explained how to structure essays, where to go to get help*

*I felt happy knowing that there was somewhere I could go if I needed help with essay writing.*

*It was interesting to see what was and was not acceptable when writing an Assignment*

*As I come from a background that hasn't really needed essays I found this informative.*

On the negative side, one student found the session:

*Slightly boring - very much the same as what had been learnt at A level.*

Another claimed:

*I have not used anything learnt from the lecture since I have had it*

*Students were asked: How helpful to you personally was the Group Meeting with your tutor during induction week?*

Most of the respondents found the group meeting with their tutor during induction week moderately helpful. Three found it very helpful, one found it slightly helpful while the remaining respondent found it not at all helpful.

Students identified some positive aspects of the meeting including:

*Good to meet other students, made aware of who to contact if you had a problem and made you feel as though you had someone to support you.*

*Good to hear what other course mates were thinking too and to meet the tutor who was friendly and made us feel we could come to her at any point.*

*It was good to get to know my tutor and be able to discuss how I was settling in. Could ask more in depth questions and knew who to go to if anything went wrong.*

On the negative side, some students felt:

*I didn't really see the point of the group meeting. If anyone had any problems I don't think they would have said anything in the group.*

*I didn't feel that we had much time to ask questions.*

*I would have preferred to have an individual meeting - I didn't know any of the other girls at this point and felt a bit uncomfortable discussing some things in front of them. I don't know how much I had in common (in term of initial settling in and adjustment stuff) with the others and felt uncomfortable.*

*I found a few people in the tutor group dominated the group meeting. many were not heard.*

*Students were asked: How helpful to you personally were the subsequent Group Meetings with your tutor during the first term?*

Students, again, were quite positive about subsequent meetings with their tutor. Seven felt the meetings had been moderately helpful, three found them slightly helpful and one found the meetings very helpful.

*A nice catch up to talk about any issues, and gave reassurance and support.*

*Could discuss problems with peers as well as tutor.*

*Again, good to be able to discuss issues with our tutor.*

Clearly, not everyone is happy with the tutor system as suggested in the following comments:

*I have found the tutor system fairly unhelpful all the way through. It has felt very impersonal and I can't believe we didn't have to meet our tutors more often - not at all in the second term. The group meetings were interesting but there was no sense of it being about issues that affect first year students.*

*Although I am happy with my personal tutor I know others have not had the same experience. I think there may be some senior members of staff that are super good at what they do but aren't really cut out for this type of mentoring role. Some comments I have heard about are not necessarily inappropriate but do show a lack of communication/people skills. I think in general the personal tutor system needs looking at. I think it is essential to build a relationship that is personal . . .*

*Not perhaps a group chat. I don't like the idea that we were asked to mail our tutors in January to let them know if we made it back. Shouldn't they be finding out if we were ok? I think contact should be much more regular and supportive.*

*Often did not need them. would have been more effective in revision time as that is when support was most needed.*

*Overall, how useful to you personally was the Speech and Language Extended Induction Programme?*

Opinion was divided about the overall helpfulness of the extended induction programme with six rating it as moderately helpful, five rating it as slightly helpful and one rating it as very helpful.

Students were asked: What could the Speech and Language Department do to improve their Extended Induction Programme? It is clear that students view Freshers' week as of fundamental importance in developing the social aspects of university life and felt occasionally that induction activities were hampering this:

*They could not make first years come in every day because a lot of the stuff could be put together on one day. it is important to remember that during Freshers' week, freshers have to go out every night to make friends etc, so having to come in every day at 9am was a pain. Freshers also have to buy the wristband, which is very expensive, but they can't make full use of it by going on day activities because we had to go to these introductory lectures.*

*More ice breakers so that people on the course get to know each other that first week. A tour of the library led by someone, rather than being given a quiz to fill in.*

*Ensure that facilities are available when sessions are organised encourage better interactions and relations between the MSc and BSc students from the outset. Encourage more departmental interaction between the stages. If you are not a member of the society (personally I am not interested in pub crawls and dressing up) you don't get any contact with other year groups; More communication of what exactly is expected. Outline what support is available and how to tap into it. Greater pre-course info on what you will need to buy - for example an expensive recording device, mics, stands etc - that was a shock. Better book list information - they are expensive! we need to plan!*

*The essay writing and using computer facilities need to be introduced much, much earlier in the term, as we had already started to write our essay but the time the talk was announced. Also we need to use the library from the first week so a thorough and early introduction would be beneficial.*

*In the first week of term all modules had an induction session, which I feel, should not have taken up the whole first session. By the end of the term the course felt very rushed so these wasted first weeks could perhaps be used more effectively.*

*You could have a better introduction for all of the girls to get to know each other.*

## **Conclusions**

Generally speaking, the SLS standard and extended inductions did provide opportunities for staff and students to meet and break the Ice; There were opportunities for students to get to know university and SLS facilities; Students were given course introductions; Students seem to have appreciated these induction activities while at the same time raising some issues that may help to improve the experience for the next intake of students such as: the timing, duration and relevancy of some elements which are outlined in their comments above.

The purposes of the standard and extended induction activities were primarily introductory, academic, technical and perhaps geographical in nature, that is, they aimed to improve students' skills in essay writing, computing, using library facilities, but also more literally in helping them to find their way around the campus. Judging by the data, the students seemed to find these activities superficially helpful and useful in academic, technical and geographical terms. It may be the case that the timing of these activities and their duration may be crucial factors in determining whether they are successful or not. It is not clear, for instance, whether their 'one-off' nature may have detracted from their usefulness. Perhaps a more sustained approach may result in deeper acquisition of these skills. Whether and to

what extent the actual formal academic aims of the induction activities were met is uncertain. Student comments seem to suggest that while they were useful, much of what was learned during these activities was of a superficial nature and quickly forgotten. There is an impression that what was learned would have to be learned again subsequently anyway and perhaps more deeply assimilated later when it is really necessary and useful.

A primary concern for students is the social aspects of university life, that is, fitting in, making friends and developing a sense of belonging. The induction activities may have met some of these more fundamental student concerns. Students made a number of comments that suggest they value any opportunities to meet their tutors and course mates. Some students seemed to express disappointment, for instance, at the brevity of meetings and the lack of interaction they had with their tutors and course mates. This may be particularly more salient for those students living off campus i.e. living at home rather than in Hall's of residence. Recognising the faces of staff and students may go a long way to helping students settle down. Looking at some of the comments about subsequent meetings with tutors, for instance, it seems that some students still had not developed a growing sense of ease in the company of their course mates.

A secondary concern for students may be geographical in nature i.e. exploring and discovering their new environment. Again, the guided tours of facilities may have had the additional impact of allowing students to familiarise themselves with their new surroundings and key locations within that environment such as the Library, lecture Halls, Student Union, Computing facilities etc. Being able to find ones way around must to some extent help students to settle down and feel more comfortable. Familiarising the students with their course of study seems to have been useful too although the timing and usefulness of the introduction to Clinical Education raised some negative comments. Nevertheless, there were still some positive comments about the course introduction and the introduction to the Clinical Education aspect of the course. These may have allayed some of the students' anxieties and concerns about the course itself.

The Speech and Language induction programme is somewhat different when considered in relation to the other case studies. Students for the Speech and Language Degree are drawn from a range of schools and colleges internal and external to the UK. The DPD suggested that the opportunity for outreach work in schools and colleges, which forms a major component of the Partners Programme, was unfeasible given the restrictions on student numbers for the SLS degree. The focus of the Speech and Language transition programme is on students at the point of entry to Newcastle University during induction week and at key points later in the first Semester.

The Staff in Speech and Language do not appear to have the same opportunities as staff in Chemistry, Student Recruitment and Animal Science, to get to know their students over an extended period of time prior to their actual engagement on the course itself. Chemistry, for instance, is engaged in a great deal of Outreach work with local schools to encourage

students to consider a career in Chemistry. The Partners programme, likewise, engages with students while they are still at school or college. Once they have been offered a place at Newcastle University, students are expected to attend a compulsory programme of pre-university course activities that in a sense primes them for their university studies. There are clearly more opportunities for staff in chemistry, Student Recruitment and Animal Science to get to know their students' strengths and weaknesses and to remedy any weaknesses before they start attending their degree course than staff in Speech and Language who have to meet their students at the point of access during induction week itself. This may result in different experiences for both SLS staff and students when compared with those staff and students who were engaged on the Partners programme, the Chemistry Outreach programme and Animal Science. These latter students have the opportunity to meet other students on their courses and 'break the Ice' well before they actually commence their studies. They also have the opportunity to discover the various services offered by the University prior to the commencement of their courses. In a sense, these students may already be one or more steps ahead of their SLS counterparts. They may, consequently, settle more quickly than their SLS peers. The social aspects of their move to university i.e. making friends etc, have already been taken care of and this may help them settle more quickly into their studies. Speech and Language Students by contrast still have this work to do on their arrival and at subsequent points during the first semester.

### **What makes a difference**

- Creating opportunities for staff and students to meet and get to know one another.
- Creating opportunities for students to familiarise themselves with their new environment.
- Providing course outlines and expectations
- Opportunities for personal contact with tutors on a group and individual basis throughout the first semester and perhaps at strategic points such as revision and exam periods.
- Students appreciate and value a supportive environment. This may require more personal contact from tutors.
- Suitable timing of the induction activities is crucial. Some students seemed torn between Freshers' week activities and SLS induction Activities. With so much going on during Freshers' week, it may be more effective to move the standard elements of the SLS induction to the week after, allowing students to focus exclusively on Fresher week activities. They may then be more receptive to the course induction activities.

## 7. Conclusions

The project has identified the following key issues.

### **Key issues arising from the project**

#### **Communication and liaison**

Communication between university departments and liaison staff in schools and colleges is complex. For each party, there are potentially multiple linkages to be made with staff who may have different role designations in each institution, and where the named person may not be a constant year-on-year.

#### ***University provision***

For staff in schools and colleges, clear contact details on each university website for key liaison personnel, not only in Student Admissions, but also in individual departments, would be valued. Where possible, University staff should engage on a departmental basis with local schools and colleges, making sure that at least one person in each department understands the learning skills and needs of applicants, disseminates this knowledge, and arranges regular contact between current and aspirant students. Having an individual who is mainly responsible for the operational aspect of outreach and transition activities, such as the holder of the RSC Teacher Fellowship in Chemistry, appears to be the key to success. Support for such posts should be maintained.

School and college staff feel somewhat daunted about the number of universities which they potentially need to contact about transition events. They note that the email addresses of staff dealing with UCAS applications are supplied to UCAS. Could these addresses be made available to Universities for block mailing about open days and transition events generally? How can the University lobby to achieve this?

A consistent request from schools and colleges in this study is that Universities should feed back to them information about the graduation success of their students.

#### ***School and college provision***

Schools and colleges transition provision works best where there is a designated, key individual who has overall responsibility for HE awareness-raising and for the application process. This person (and their team) would regularly 'push' individual students (from year 11 onwards) to particular transition activities such as open days, student shadowing or roadshows, and would oversee and monitor the UCAS application process.

Schools and college students ask for a clear programme of support for university application to be publicised by their school or colleges, which is updated as necessary. Applicants should be offered specific advice and activities at crucial times, such as advice on financial planning at a time before applications for funding support are due in – but not so early so that the information is ‘lost’ and is meaningless. They ask that schools and colleges seek feedback from current applicants to revise the schedule and the types of information offered in the future.

Schools and colleges should supportively encourage students to be proactive in their preparation for university, and to become increasingly independent in relation to their learning and study skills.

### **Multiple pathways for raising aspiration**

Multiple strategies are needed to raise levels of self-belief among young people who may not currently aspire to University. Liaison needs to start early – in primary school – and offer a range of ways in which young people can relate to universities and imagine themselves as university students. For those nearing the end of their schooling, the main benefits are to be gained from one-to-one or small group contact with current students and engagement with ‘real’ university experience, such as living in halls and experiencing university teaching.

Transition activities need to be co-ordinated across the University, so that generic and subject-specific activities complement each other.

### **Parents and carers**

Parents and carers are crucial to student aspiration and admission to university. This is recognised in the PARTNERS scheme, which offers specific activities for parents. It is important to have friendly accessible contact in the University for local parents and carers, with some opportunity for individual discussion and information-giving. Information on finance is particularly needed.

Schools and colleges should engage with and encourage parents of potential university students from as early on as possible.

### **Generic and subject-specific support networks**

Networks such as PARTNERS and VETNET enable schools and colleges to access a range of activities for aspirant students. These in turn enable students to imagine themselves at university, aspire to HE study, and take up opportunities of a wider circle of events. The PARTNERS network is known and widely appreciated by students and staff in all the schools and colleges visited.

Subject-specific pathways, such as VETNET are able to work supportively with students through their Level 3 programme at school or, more often, at college, which eases transition to University. Where

appropriate, this approach could be adopted more widely within the University, particularly in vocationally oriented departments.

### **Student induction**

Induction starts before the student arrives at University, through the information and contacts sent out to incoming students. Mature students in particular need information well in advance of arrival about course timetabling and the nature and timing of assessment.

Initial induction is valuable in creating opportunities for staff and students to meet and get to know one another, for creating opportunities for students to familiarise themselves with their new environment, and for clarifying course outlines and student expectations.

It is generally agreed that the induction process lasts for the first semester, possibly the first year, not simply the first week. Benefits are seen in starting some teaching activity in the first week – possibly combined with an off-site residential experience – and in allowing time for students to take part in Freshers' week activities to establish themselves socially at University. There is general concern about an overload of information presented in Induction Week.

Continuing induction support is offered through the personal tutor system and through early feedback on progress and achievement. Opportunities for personal contact with tutors on a group and individual basis throughout the first semester and perhaps at strategic points such as revision and exam periods are valued. Students appreciate and value a supportive environment, and this may require more personal contact from tutors. Support for personal tutors therefore needs to be secure.

### **Finally...**

The overall message from the young people involved in this project is that throughout the process of enquiry, application, transition and induction they wish to be treated as individuals, not as members of a seemingly amorphous student body. Even small amounts of one-to-one contact with current students or with University staff during this process can have a hugely positive effect.