

## 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.