Early intervention, transition and engagement – interventions to improve the Bolton student journey

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Introduction
This poster showcases details of an ongoing, longitudinal, umbrella research project entitled “Early intervention, transition and engagement – interventions to improve the Bolton student journey”. The umbrella project comprises six individual projects designed to understand student transition and engagement and to improve the student journey at the University of Bolton, UK. Each of the six projects involve the design and implementation of a specific intervention. The umbrella project is designed to improve student transition by addressing issues around social integration, engagement, early intervention and assessment of needs and pinpointing the times of year when students experience difficulties. It is also concerned with improving the learner experience and the learning environment. Finally the project also seeks to understand what factors cause students to withdraw from university. It aims to build on existing research, both locally and nationally, on academic retention, to understand how we can apply transition pedagogy (Kift & Nelson, 2005) in our own context to build an early intervention and transitional support model which ensures that students “at risk” of low attainment and attrition are able to access support at the earliest opportunity.

Six Engagement & Transition Interventions
The six projects forming part of this umbrella project are: (1) the Bolton student journey mapping project, (2) the “Get Ahead” Summer School project, (3) early intervention and transitional support – an enhanced personal tutoring model, (4) the Social Learning Zone (SLZ) redesign project, (5) understanding “gritty” students and (6) peer learning and engagement project. Each project aims to engage with staff and students who have taken part in these interventions to assess the impact that these have had on student transition, engagement and retention. The data collected from all six interventions will enable the project team to build a rich picture of the multitude of factors that influence and affect university life at Bolton. The information helps us to understand how best to support our students to transition into university life and address the barriers that many face when studying. The data from all six projects will be fed back directly into the operational planning cycle and used to help inform improvements to the student experience across the institution. The data will be shared via research fora, such as conferences, and also contribute to impact case studies.

Methodology
Each project employs a mixed-methods approach to data collection and analysis. Staff and students participate in questionnaires, focus groups and semi-structured interviews for each intervention. The project collects participants’ demographic data and focuses on psychosocial factors to yield both quantitative and qualitative data. Questionnaires are used to provide a loose structure for the interviews, where participants were asked to explore further some of their responses to the quantitative and qualitative questions. Interviews are conducted with a cross-section of participants. The data is being transcribed, coded and a thematic content analysis was conducted based on models advocated by Braun & Clarke (2006) and Bryman (2008). For qualitative data, key ideas and words are systematically highlighted, text is then grouped and coded and the codes are later refined. Further analysis consists of exploring and analysing the relationship and patterns between codes before grouping data into themes and sub-themes. Deeper analysis involves interpreting qualitative data and comparing it with the quantitative data to produce the results.

Preliminary Findings
Data collection and analysis is still ongoing. Some of the quantitative results of the Bolton student journey mapping project are featured below (see figure 1). The journey mapping project is integral to the impact of the overall umbrella project and has enabled us to identify the times of year when students are most concerned about particular aspects of their student experience, helping to inform our approach to supporting student transition.

![Figure 1](http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/docs/presentation/keynote)

**Figure 1** – the time of year when students had particular concerns

![Figure 2](http://fyhe.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Kift-Sally-ALT-Fellowship-Report-Sep-092.pdf)

**Figure 2**: Student grit model: languishing to thriving students (Kannangara, McIntosh & Carson (Manuscript in preparation))

Preliminary findings from the project to understand “gritty” students has helped to inform the student grit model (see figure 2, above).

Informing the Student Experience
The results from all six projects are being used to inform an “early intervention and transitional support” model to address transition and engagement at Bolton, based on a “whole of institution” approach (Kift, 2015) and applying the six principles of transition pedagogy. Preliminary findings suggest that students identify primarily with their school and programme and that they value tutor and peer support. All these elements are integral to the cultivation of grit and resilience. The model promotes a smoother transition to university, enhanced peer learning opportunities and better coordinated tutor support. A more integrated approach to transition is being evaluated and the longitudinal impact of initiatives is being assessed. It is expected that this multi-faceted approach will result in improved retention rates, increased attainment and more meaningful engagement between students and staff at the university.

References