Development of a Research-informed Intervention to Increase Adjustment in First Year Undergraduates to Target Retention and Academic Success (The REACT Project)

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Poor adjustment to university in the first academic year predicts student attrition and low academic results (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994)

Typical markers of maladjustment are:

- Loneliness
- Depression
- Poor emotional management (Beyers & Goossens, 2002; Nightingale et al., 2013)

Research indicates that this is a significant problem, with a third of UK undergraduates showing stable poor adjustment across the first year (Nightingale et al., 2013)
University funded project:

**Factors that lead to successful adjustment to university**

**How?**
- Meta literature review examining effective strategies to promote adjustment and increase success and retention
- Student focus groups facilitated by undergraduate students

**Why?**
- The proposed research project aims to develop an intervention which targets loneliness, depression and emotional management in first year undergraduates in order to improve retention and academic success.
Methodology: Literature Review

- Adjustment to university: *A literature review examining effective strategies to promote adjustment and increase success and retention*

The importance of successful adjustment to university

- Importance of transitions and successful adjustment—retention and academic achievement
- Find factors that have been found to influence adjustment/achievement/retention
Summary of Literature Review Findings

Factors relating to adjustment:
- University based (e.g. student information, facilities, peer interactions, academic support)
  - Mediated by individual perceptions of support available
- Individual based (e.g. social anxiety, self-esteem, reasons for attending, academic resourcefulness, emotional intelligence)

Factors correlated with having an intention to withdraw have been found to differentiate by year of study and the university attended

Interventions supporting success and retention:
- Many successful interventions based around social support – peer mentoring schemes, group discussions, social networking sites.
- Interventions targeted at academic ability (e.g. critical thinking skills) have been found successful amongst students who required support.
Undergraduate Student Focus Groups

What did we do?

• Participants recruited through a combined approach, including self-selection (presentations delivered by the undergrad research assistants) and lecturer referral

• 3 Focus Groups

• Transcription and thematic analysis
Undergraduate Student Focus Groups: Thematic Map

What have we found?

• Relationships with staff have an impact on social and academic adjustment – highly valued, enhances feelings of belonging
• Peer relationships important for adjustment
• Small classrooms and individual motivation enhance relationships
• Induction to university (fresher's fair) negatively received – drinking, partying
Thematic Map

A summary of the preliminary findings based on initial coding of the data.
Undergraduate Student Focus Groups: The Students Voice

• “But I do think you feel a bit low and were able to approach our teachers so they sort of like push you and motivate you and actually they do give us support.”

• “like I said when you do get good relationships at uni... First year it was actually really hard, but second and third year ive built like more relationships with the tutors and stuff... and that’s been really good cos like when your struggling you can have a bit of a moan and a whinge. And you, say you can put yourself down and your like oh I really can’t do this and they’ll be dead positive with you and I think that like boosts you up and its really good that”

• “we were just working in normal classrooms of about 10 to 12 of us. So we got to know each other a lot easier than being in a large group”

• “I’d say it’s the friendships ive made, people on my course and those outside the course, it kinda just keeps you grounded, ive really enjoyed that”
Future Direction - Development of an intervention

- Information from the focus groups will be used in combination with findings from the recent literature to develop an intervention to support adjustment to university and improve retention.
References


The React project

Thank you
For further questions or enquires about this project do not hesitate to contact us

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