

Title: **Becoming, Being and Belonging: Learning gain through transition support for articulation students**

Presenter: **Tom Cunningham, Lorraine Anderson & Michael Allardice**
University of Dundee

Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- Understand the Student Transition Enhancement Programme for University Progression Dundee (STEP UP) module and its relevance to the conference themes of teaching excellence and learning gain.
- Reflect further on the importance of the student transition into and the development of becoming, being and belonging as a student in higher education.
- Consider the impact of the STEP UP module through a discussion of the quantitative and qualitative research evidence, and discuss lessons for wider practice on student transition.

Session Outline

Creating a sense of belonging is crucial to the retention, progression and attainment of students in Higher Education (HE). Thomas (2012) argues that student belonging is achieved through (1) Supportive peer relations, (2) Meaningful interaction between staff and students, (3) Developing knowledge, confidence and identity as successful HE learners and (4) An HE experience relevant to students' interests and future goals.

In order to support individuals become, be and belong as University of Dundee students, the Centre for the enhancement of Academic Skills, Teaching, Learning and Employability (CASTLE) has developed a bespoke transition module called STEP UP. This module aims to meet Thomas' four conditions through a series of interactive, workshop-based classes and an assessed group project.

The first STEP UP cohort is formed of articulation students in Humanities and Art & Design. Articulation in a Scottish context is defined as:

a student gaining entry into second year of a degree with a Higher National Certificate (HNC) gained at college, or into third year with a Higher National Diploma (HND) gained at college. (Scottish Funding Council 2015, p.2)

Students on STEP UP are currently studying for their HNC at Dundee & Angus College, with a guaranteed entry to second year of their degree upon successful completion of their studies.

STEP UP reflects the University of Dundee's increasing experience in articulation; including reflections on the recently developed Co-Curriculum programmes in Life Sciences (Brewer et al. 2015) and research into the student experience of articulation to Dundee (Cunningham 2015). Developing confident, independent learners, classes held on University campus during the College year, interaction with University staff and systems, and developing a positive cohort identity have all been built into the design of STEP UP.

This session will outline the STEP UP module; including the rationale and underlying philosophy, intended learning outcomes, content and assessment criteria, and student feedback. It will then explore the outcomes of a research project undertaken to evaluate students' learning gain through engagement with the STEP UP module, alongside academic and student services staff perspectives. This will facilitate discussion of best practice and strategies for supporting effective student transition into HE.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

The outline of the workshop is as follows;

20 minutes presentation, including research project findings

10 minutes small-group discussion, with reflection on STEP UP, and implications for wider practice

15 minutes plenary with each group reporting back findings

Indicative questions:

What is your conception of 'learning gain' and what evidence is there of learning gain for students through their engagement with the module?

How are you measuring the impact of the STEP UP module?

What effect might this module have on retention, progression and attainment rates for articulation students and learners more generally?

Which kinds of students would benefit most from the STEP UP approach?

What learning environments and different technologies were used, and how important were these in the delivery of the module?

References

Brewer, N., Booth, D., Morris, L., Coates, D. (2015) "Widening access to HE in partnership with FE Colleges: Supporting, developing and enabling students to succeed from

disadvantaged backgrounds and make successful transitions”, *QAA Enhancement Themes International Conference*, Glasgow.

Cunningham, T. (2015) “Not Getting Lost in Articulation”, *QAA Enhancement Themes International Conference*, Glasgow

Thomas L (2012) *Building student engagement and belonging in Higher Education at a time of change: final report from the What Works? Student Retention & Success programme*, Paul Hamlyn Foundation: London.

Scottish Funding Council (2015) “Commission on Widening Access: Articulation Paper”, http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/CMP_AccessandInclusionCommittee16February_17022016/AIC16_07_Articulation_Policy_Update.pdf, accessed 28/01/17