

Title: **Supporting the socio-academic transition of postgraduate taught students - Students' and tutors' perspective**

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Session Learning Outcomes

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

- identify some of the socio-academic transition needs of PGT students and how these might be similar to and different from undergraduate students;
- consider the perspectives of students and tutors on integration and transition needs of PGT students;
- share good practice in supporting the socio-academic transition of PGT students
- reflect on learning from the session in shaping their own support activity.

Session Outline

Recent introduction of PGT loans has attracted a number of students to undertake postgraduate studies who would conventionally not have considered pursuing higher studies. Often PGT students can be very diverse (in age, personal/professional experience, etc.) and hence it cannot be assumed they have a specialist prerequisite understanding of the subject and/or of the demands of undertaking postgraduate studies, due to assumptions of their 'expert status' (Tobbell et al., 2010). Furthermore, whilst the three year undergraduate study allows for a certain element of 'bedding in', postgraduate study often comprises one year of intensive study, necessitating that students are confident in their ability to study from the outset of their course. These and other factors have brought to the fore some of the socio-academic integration needs of these students. Whilst there is a body of work identifying the undergraduate students' socio-academic transition needs (see for example Cheng et al, 2015), there appears to be limited research on the PGT students' transition needs (Tobbell and O'Donnell, 2013). Furthermore, considering students as change agents in identifying such needs and working collaboratively with tutors in developing interventions to support these has received limited attention.

This session reports on the findings of a preliminary exploration into the socio-academic transition needs of PGT students, and encourages participants to engage with early findings from their own perspectives. We will share initial outputs from:

- a collaborative literature review undertaken by students and tutors focussing on the socio-academic transitions needs of university students;
- pilot interviews undertaken by a student with approximately ten postgraduate students and their tutors on how the transition needs as identified from literature relate to their own transition needs;
- follow up survey (co-designed by a student and tutor) with a cohort of postgraduate students and tutors to identify the key socio-academic transition needs of PGT students.

The findings may have implications for HE institutions when considering and designing effective approaches for supporting the socio-academic transitions of PGT students.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

Introduction (5-minutes)

Context of the study will be presented along with the key external and internal drivers which have necessitated this study.

Presentation (15-minutes)

The findings of the Exploratory Stage of the study will be shared.

Reflections and Discussion (25-minutes)

The discussion would focus on encouraging participants to share their views on the socio-academic transition needs of the postgraduate students.

In particular, participants will look at anonymised interview extracts to encourage exploration and discussion. Subsequently, participants will be encouraged to reflect on a series of questions and to feedback to the team. The specific questions the participants would be requested to reflect on are as under:

- What are the socio-academic transitions needs of the PGT students within their institutions?
- How might these be different from undergraduate students and what unique challenges do these differences pose in supporting the transition of PGT students?
- How might a lack of support may have an impact on the socio-academic integration of PGT students and the institution? Why might support for PGT students be important in the current context?
- What do you believe institutions do (or their institution is doing) to best support the socio-academic integration/transition of PGT students

Towards the end of this session, participants will be invited to join a collaborative cross-institutional network to share and develop better understanding of the socio-academic transition needs of PGT students within the UK and share good practice in this field.

References

- Cheng, M., Barnes, G. P., Edwards, C., Valyrakis, M., & Corduneanu, R. (2015b). Transition Skills and Strategies: Key Transition Skills. Glasgow: QAA. [Retrieved at: <http://enhancementthemes.ac.uk/enhancement-themes/current-enhancement-theme/transition-skills>]
- Jane Tobbell & O'Donnell V. L.(2013) Transition to postgraduate study: postgraduate ecological systems and identity, Cambridge Journal of Education, 43:1, 123-138, DOI: 10.1080/0305764X.2012.749215
- Tobbell, J., O'Donnell, V.L., & Zammit, M. (2010). Exploring transition to postgraduate study: Shifting identities in interaction with communities, practice and participation. British Education Research Journal, 36, 261–278.