

Title: **Authenticating postgraduate taught student identity through cross-level transition Initiatives**

Presenter: **Mark F Smith, Chloe Rollings, Postgraduate Student Representative**
University of Lincoln

Session Learning Outcomes

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

- Been exposed to the ongoing steps University of Lincoln are taking through our 'Learning at Lincoln' platform and through the lived experiences of our students to explore how we are establishing transition toolkits to strengthen professional and academic identity within our postgraduate communities;
- Considered why re-establishing a 'postgraduate' student identity within their course of study is critical to effective transition across educational borders;
- Reflected on their own institutional practices, sharing how they support both within and into-institution transition initiatives for those students entering into postgraduate programmes;
- Proposed a range of emergent supportive initiatives and resources that work in partnership with students to foster professional and academic identity across transition.

Session Outline

Sector evidence repeatedly highlights the importance of transition across educational borders as a means of achieving learner's preparedness for continued study, their ongoing experiences and achievement of success (Briggs et al, 2012; O'Donnell et al, 2016). The focus upon postgraduate taught students has been less evidenced, but work that has explored this (Heussi, A., 2012 Mellors-Bourne et al, 2016; Tobbell et al, 2010) highlights the importance of identity as a critical temporal feature intrinsically linked to their advanced educational and professional development.

The session will focus upon the notion that transition involves the management of identity change, and how an individual manages such change is a function of past experiences, and the effectiveness of institutional process and activity. We will look to explore transition not a binary function of progression, rather 'transition as becoming' and one that is flexible and more accommodating to re-establish a student's professional and academic identity (Gale & Parker, 2014).

Central to this idea is the interplay between centralised induction programmes and administrative activities, and localised initiatives within and around discipline specific

teaching and learning support activities and practice. Indeed, work by Wenger proposes that the development of identity is very much bound within the notion of 'transition as becoming'. The evolution of professional and academic identity is seen as an ongoing process, constructed in social contexts, one that is not limited to a linear notion of time, and one which is defined with respect to the interaction of multiple convergent and divergent trajectories (1999).

The session will explore with participants the connection between ongoing transition and emergent postgraduate student identity, one that is bound within communities of practice where we act to form and legitimise these. The session will aim to establish a collective discourse on postgraduate student identity and how this can be best embedded into our partnership work with students.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

- Delegates will be grouped onto tables of between 4-5 delegates per table (dependent on numbers);
- Be welcomed and introduced to the facilitators, the session aims and objectives (5 minutes);
- Be set the workshop scene - this will be phrased as a problem each group will need to solve: *"We seldom spend sufficient time effectively authenticating postgraduate professional and academic student identity through cross-level transition Initiatives"*;
- Be provided with a 'workshop brief' placed on each table. This will include a summary of research evidence, a check list, a student case study and a series of linked questions they will be referred to throughout the workshop (10 minutes);
- *Complete Task One* – Referring to their 'workshop brief' student case study, delegates will be asked, in their groups, to define the features, characteristics and qualities essential for a strong Postgraduate Student Identity. They will be expected to consider the student journey prior to entry into postgraduate study, discipline-specific implications, and the varying types of student that may undertake postgraduate study (e.g., professional, mature, part-time) (20 minutes including feedback time);
- *Complete Task Two* – Referring to their 'workshop brief' research evidence: and drawing upon their own institutional transition initiatives, delegates will be asked to capture what support activities and initiatives (whether central or local) they have in place to help build student identity. Specifically, they will need to rate these based on their effectiveness and show how they communicate this to their postgraduate study groups during transition (20 minutes including feedback time);
- *Complete Task Three* – Referring to their 'workshop brief' and feedback collected by the facilitators throughout (this will be captured and shared), delegates will be required to build a transition activity/resource that can be undertaken by postgraduate students to help build professional and/or academic identity (20 minutes including feedback time);
- A review of the session and a sharing of developed activities. The facilitators will gather these and construct these into user templates that can be circulated to delegates after the workshop (15 minutes including evaluation time).

References

Briggs, A.R., Clark, J. and Hall, I., 2012. Building bridges: understanding student transition to university. *Quality in Higher Education*, 18(1), pp.3-21.

Gale, T. and Parker, S., 2014. Navigating change: a typology of student transition in higher education, *Studies in Higher Education*, 39:5, 734-753,

Heussi, A., 2012. Postgraduate student perceptions of the transition into postgraduate study. *Student Engagement and Experience Journal*, 1(3).

Mellors-Bourne, R., Mountford-Zimdars, A., Wakeling, P., Rattray, J. and Land, R., 2016. Postgraduate transitions: Exploring disciplinary practice. Higher Education Academy. Retrieved from https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/postgraduate_transitions_exploring_disciplinary_practice.pdf

O'Donnell, V. L., Kean, M., & Stevens, G., 2016. Student transition in higher education. Higher Education Academy.

Tobbell, J., O'Donnell, V., and Zammit, M., 2010. Exploring transition to postgraduate study: shifting identities in interaction with communities, practice and participation. *British Educational Research Journal*, 36(2), 261-278.

Wenger, E., 1999. *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge university press.