MIND THE GAP – E-TRANSITIONING TO UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

Widening access for higher education causes a re-calibration of expectations for students, academics and for Universities. Recruitment from different areas, educational backgrounds and ethnicities requires a reconsideration of assumptions about the skills and competencies that students have on arrival.

This paper presents a report and early findings from a study funded by the UK Government Office for Students and co-ordinated by four leading Universities. In particular, it focuses on the preparedness for study of students from non-traditional educational backgrounds but sheds light on the preparedness of students generally, academics and Universities.

The project had three distinct phases that reflect the underlying theory of change methodology:
1. Qualitative research interviews and focus groups with recent entrants and staff teaching them. This helped the project focus on key interventions that could respond to perceived gaps in provision.
2. Planning, design and deployment of interventions. This paper focuses on an online resource for University preparation known as “Warm_up”, to be offered to students in the weeks before arrival at University. Warm_up is an interactive resource that focuses on Numeracy, Essay writing and some transferrable skills. It seeks development in the skills, offers exercises and readings to help improve them and an opportunity to reflect on progress.
3. Qualitative and quantitative analysis of the online intervention, including the interactions with students.

The project produced convincing evidence of the “gaps” in student study skills before they entered University. It also highlighted gaps in academic enthusiasm for on-line interventions and in the ability of university VLE systems to deliver good quality on-line/e-learning resources.

The research, itself, provided some evidence of impact on students. It provided a better evidence of impact on the institution.

Keywords: e-learning, transition, university, digital.