

# Sticky Course Guidelines

The following course development guidelines are based on learning from this QAA funded Collaborative Enhancement Project. They consider what helps to make a course sticky, where a student may 'stick to and stick with' their learning. The guidelines provide links to our project resources for further information and a series of provocations for reflection so readers can also consider how the concept of 'stickiness' can be developed within their own course to aid student retention and attainment.

## Supporting Student Transition

**Preparation activities** can support new students to transition into the course and into higher education before they arrive on campus. These may be formed of generic materials to support the [transition to university study](#), such as information on the university, higher education requirements, development and becoming, for example, [De Montfort University's BaseCamp induction resource](#), and subject specific materials which may include resource/materials lists and course induction tasks. This pre work may then be followed up as part of initial course induction activities via an active learning approach once students commence their course transitioning that learning into Higher Education. Providing opportunities to connect with others in this pre arrival space can also support preparedness for study and build community, such as [University of Brighton's use of the Unibuddy@ platform](#).

Questions to consider might include...

- What generic or subject specific pre arrival activities best support student transition in your discipline?
- How could this be built into induction/welcome week to help bridge the transition 'gap' and develop confidence?
- How might the course team learn more about incoming students to create student centred provision that meets students 'where they are'?

Whilst **induction/welcome weeks** are a key moment in transition to Higher Education or the next award level, students can feel a sense of information overload. Developing term long/yearlong [induction](#) activities aligned with the student journey can help to ensure students develop relevant knowledge and skills for learning, and awareness of the wider student support offer, university systems and processes at the points in their course where they need to most draw on those resources. Extended induction approaches can support this, for example: [Glasgow Caledonian University's PGR induction](#) or a flexible framework like [DMU's BaseCamp](#) which can be accessed by students at any time, be personalised and contains resources which staff may use and contextualise for use within the curriculum. Where this is delivered in line with the student journey and course delivery it resonates more with students.

Example activities might be exploring what 'good' academic practice looks like or sharing mitigating circumstances processes prior to an assessment.

Questions to consider might include...

- What are the key points within the student journey where new knowledge/skills are required? How does that support pinch points/risk points of potential student drop out?
- What place, space or mechanism can most effectively deliver these activities to ensure student engagement?
- How might you structure induction to maximise student awareness and knowledge of support, systems and academic processes and protocols so student can draw on these when they need them?

A student journey into a new course can sometimes be 'bumpy'. **Late arrival** through visa delays, course changes or late acceptance through clearing can often mean students may miss welcome & induction activities as well as teaching weeks. Feeling disconnection from the established group can exacerbate the risk of drop out and lost learning can increase the risk of failure. Having recap points within course delivery, lecture recordings, VLE resources and flexible tutor support can assist as well as [repositories](#) covering [induction and transition support](#).

Questions to consider might include...

- How does your course design support late arrival? What 'catch up' resources exist? What personal support is available?
- What can be built into the course to continue [building community and connection with others](#), places and spaces further into the first teaching term or block?

**You can find further information on project partners reflections on student transition in Section 1 of our [witness seminar](#).**

## **Facilitating Student Communities**

[Getting to know places and spaces, peers and tutors](#) is a key part of **developing a sense of community** and belonging. Informal but structured group activities can help to facilitate getting to know others in a more relaxed environment. Formal and informal group work within the curriculum can develop this further using self-selected or tutor selected groupings. Providing opportunities within the course to [express personal identity](#) and [share that with others](#) can support in building student to student and [student to staff](#) relationships. Creating spaces for co working can avoid the sense of isolation, for example, [dedicated PGR spaces](#), flexible open access and bookable group study spaces. Online spaces such as Virtual Learning Environments (discussion boards) and [MSTeams \(chat\)](#) and platforms such as Padlet, [Unibuddy©](#) etc can be utilised to supplement learning and community building or in lieu of face to face activity and can support off campus belonging, for example during [periods of placement](#). Student-led community activities can parallel formal course-based activity. For example, the [BESST Buddies Scheme](#) at UoB provides informal peer support through the year but also at key pinch points. Students may also opt for their own informal chat groups on external social media platforms. Multi modal approaches support commuting students and those with challenges with continuous

face-to-face engagement by drawing together mixed methods to sustain community and belonging.

Questions to consider might include...

- How is the programme delivered? Fully face to face, hybrid, online? How in each of those cases is a sense of community, belonging and mattering developed and maintained?
- How do students who don't or infrequently come on to campus have the same opportunities to develop peer to peer and student to tutor networks?
- What community building activities are built into the course? When is the most effective timing? Who will be involved? What is the 'space or place' of the activity?
- How are students prepared for any work-based learning? How is a sense of community and connection with their course maintained whilst on [placement](#)?

**For further guidance and inspiration see our infographic resources on...**

- [Designing Online Peer Communities](#)
- [Defining the Purpose of Online Peer Communities](#)
- [Mentoring and Peer Learning: Setting Up a Scheme in HE](#)
- [Online Peer Communities Decision Tree](#)

**You can find further information on project partners reflections on facilitating student community in Section 2 of our [witness seminar](#).**

### **Student Centred/Enquiry Based Learning**

Student cohorts are often highly **diverse**, in their personal characteristics, where they may have come from geographically, [their own lived experiences](#), [expectations](#) and their academic journey to get to university (which may enfold a variety of entry qualifications). Therefore, we shouldn't assume an initial consistent level of knowledge and skills without understanding the cohort more fully. The breadth of university programmes adds to this diversity where students across the university are undertaking different levels and modes of study, delivery models and target qualifications requiring flexible and customisable institutional approaches.

Questions to consider might include...

- What can you learn about your students, their backgrounds, aspirations, motivations, [knowledge and skills](#) to ensure you meet students 'where they are'?
- How is inclusivity by design embedded? Are there any barriers to engagement? E.g. timing of lectures and local travel provision, field trips outside of the timetable, which need to be overcome
- Are alternative forms of assessment available to support the diversity of the cohort?
- Is there a variety of assessment which speaks to a range of learning approaches?

Enquiry based learning encourages students to pursue enquiry, drawing on their knowledge and developing learning. This can support student retention by allowing students to see themselves in the subject, to identify people who represent them,

providing an opportunity to [draw on their own identity](#), culture and skills which may not always be reflected in the examples within the curriculum, developing stronger personal course connections. Collective enquiry can also be facilitated through [peer-to-peer learning](#).

Questions to consider might include...

- What opportunities are included for enquiry within the course?
- How are student supported and scaffolded to engage with enquiry?
- What opportunities exist to connect the learning across students/modules/course?

Student-centred pedagogies such as enquiry-based learning, [problem-based/active learning](#) can help [students engage](#) and really think about their subject in context. How their subject may be applied into real life settings through situated learning, authentic assessment or opportunities to share learning with peers or external parties for feedback, such as industry partners, supports the development of employability and provides relevance of learning, connecting with student's future aspirations.

Questions to consider might include...

- How is active learning and teaching embedded in the course?
- What opportunities exist for authentic assessment?
- How can wider voices provide feedback? Peers? External parties, such as industry, community or subject partners to maximise learning and situate relevance for students.
- How can assessment design facilitate risk taking, in creative disciplines for example, where students have opportunities to gain credit for experimentation, ideation, process and reflection without constraints of a successful final product?

**You can find further information on project partners reflections on student centred/enquiry-based learning in Section 3 of our [witness seminar](#).**

**Further resources can be found in our [Sticky Course Toolkit](#).**

This resource is an output from a [Collaborative Enhancement Project](#) supported and funded by QAA Membership. The project is led by De Montfort University in partnership with Glasgow Caledonian University, University of Brighton and University of the Arts London. Find out more about Collaborative Enhancement Projects on the [QAA website](#).