

Thematic Report on Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) Reports 2013-16: Transitions into University

Overview

In this report we highlight good practice and areas for development as featured in the ELIR Outcome and Technical Reports 2013-16. The key findings emerging from Outcome Reports in relation to **transitions into university** were:

Activity to promote good practice

- **Transition support into higher education** - At Abertay University there is a deliberate and sustainable strategy for providing effective support to students entering the University from its partner colleges. This is demonstrated through its progression data and by the University's wide range of support activities including dedicated student transition officers; collaborative approaches to curriculum development and delivery; outreach work with local communities; and the Teaching, Learning and Enhancement team providing staff development opportunities for staff of the University's partners.
- **Proactive student support** - The University of Dundee is successful in supporting a diverse student population. Academic and professional services provide integrated support across individual services for all students, both pre and post-enrolment, as well as effectively targeting support for particular student groups. Feedback from students is particularly positive in relation to Disability Services, the Careers Service, and the Library and Learning Centre. There is a proactive approach to supporting the progression and development of postgraduate research students. In particular, these students are very positive about the support provided by thesis monitoring committees and the generic skills training delivered by Organisational and Professional Development.
- **Widening participation** - The University of Dundee has an effective approach to recruiting and supporting the entry of students from non-traditional backgrounds. It provides a range of opportunities including articulation routes and the Dundee University Access to Learning (DUAL) Summer School. This programme provides academic and study skills support for students, particularly those from non-traditional backgrounds, who may lack the standard qualifications for entry into the University. Students accessing the University via the DUAL Summer School commented positively on the effectiveness of the programme in preparing them for study at the higher education level.
- **Strategic approach to widening participation** - The University of Glasgow has a successful track record in recruiting and supporting widening participation students and has in place a range of widening participation initiatives. In particular, students who had participated in the Top-Up programme were very positive about the support they received. The programme helps secondary school pupils to develop academic skills in support of their transition to, and retention in, higher education. The University is now developing its strategic approach to widening participation by creating the MD40 group, which brings together academic and support staff from across the University to promote an integrated approach to supporting the success of MD40 students.

- **Use of data to support student progress** - The University of Glasgow undertakes detailed analysis of student data in relation to MD40 students. This enables it to identify those students who may need additional help, and to provide targeted support without such students being aware that they are being singled out in any way. The University now intends to expand this successful approach to supporting student progress to include its international students.
- **Successful promotion of widening participation and student transitions** - Glasgow Caledonian University has a positive and successful approach to promoting widening participation and supporting a wide variety of student transitions into the institution. This is demonstrated through its progression and retention data and by the University's wide range of activities, including implementation of its College Connect Strategy, designed to enhance and support students entering the University from college, and the Caledonian Club, which provides targeted community engagement as well as an opportunity for current students to act as a mentor for school pupils.
- **Widening access** - The University of the Highlands and Islands has a proactive and multifaceted approach to widening access including continued support once students are admitted. A range of activities are embedded in the University's practice including extensive and effective use of the recognition of prior learning, and active networks with schools and colleges. Support after admission is provided through the Personal Academic Tutors and programme leaders.
- **Commitment to widening access** - There is a strong commitment and effective approach to widening participation at Robert Gordon University, as demonstrated by proactive outreach strategies and collaborative initiatives that are specifically designed to support non-traditional students in accessing the University.
- **Positive approach to widening participation** - The University of St Andrews has a wide range of initiatives and activities aimed at raising aspirations and promoting widening access to higher education. There are effective arrangements in place to support students who enter the University from a widening participation background, in line with the University's intention to be academically, but not socially, elite.
- **Approach to widening participation** - The University of Strathclyde has a strong commitment to widening participation, as demonstrated by its proactive outreach strategies and collaborative initiatives, which are specifically designed to support non-traditional students in accessing the University.
- **Widening participation** - At the University of the West of Scotland there are well-established relationships with schools and colleges that facilitate successful transitions to the University for students from non-traditional backgrounds. A range of activities aimed at widening participation are carried out including providing access to University learning resources for groups of college students who are given associate student status. Student mentors who had participated in the 'Routes for All' programme, an initiative that provides academic and study skills support for senior year high school pupils, were very positive about their experience.

Areas for development

- **Support for a more diverse student population** - In the context of its plans to promote widening participation and diversify its student population, the University of Aberdeen was encouraged to progress a range of intended actions (including those relating to internationalisation and broadening its analysis of progression rates) to include part-time and postgraduate students. The University was also asked to consider the access for part-time students to student support services, such as the Student Learning Service, out of core hours.

- **Recognition of prior learning** - The University of Dundee was encouraged to progress the planned review of assessment policy including the policy for the recognition of prior learning. In particular, the University was encouraged to ensure that, following the review, policy relating to exemptions granted for the award of second taught postgraduate master's degrees meets sector expectations.
- **Provision of information** - Glasgow School of Art was encouraged to progress the work being undertaken by senior staff in each of the three schools to review the provision of information for students. GSA was encouraged to ensure that students on all programmes have access to comprehensive and user-friendly information, in addition to programme specifications, about their programmes of study and other aspects of academic provision.
- **Postgraduate research student induction and training** - Heriot-Watt University was encouraged to ensure all postgraduate research students receive effective and consistent induction irrespective of when or where they commence their studies. In addition, the University was asked to review the policy and training provision for research students who undertake teaching-related activities to ensure all students fulfilling this role are trained and supported to do so, and that there is appropriate linkage between training and teaching opportunities.
- **New curriculum** - In the context of a range of positive developments relating to the new undergraduate curriculum, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland was encouraged to ensure the purpose and role of transitions tutors was clearly defined and understood by staff and students. In particular, the Conservatoire was encouraged to clarify the role of transitions tutors in providing advice to support students in fulfilling their learning contracts. It was also suggested that there would be benefit in the Conservatoire considering the ways it could work to manage the likely increase in student demand for elements of the new curriculum including Bridge Week projects and popular 'Choice' modules.

Introduction

As part of the ELIR 3 method, QAA Scotland produces regular Thematic Reports to support learning from the outcomes of individual ELIR reports. The purpose of the Thematic Reports is to inform future development work in the sector and, in particular, to inform future QAA activity including work carried out in collaboration with the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC).

Scope and structure of this report

This report identifies material relating to transitions into university contained within the ELIR reports for all 18 Scottish higher education institutions reviewed in the ELIR 3 cycle (2013-16). The institutions included in this report are: the University of Aberdeen; Abertay University; the University of Dundee; the University of Edinburgh; Edinburgh Napier University; Glasgow School of Art; Glasgow Caledonian University; the University of Glasgow; Heriot-Watt University; the University of the Highlands and Islands; Queen Margaret University; Robert Gordon University; the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland; Scotland's Rural College (SRUC); the University of St Andrews; the University of Stirling; the University of Strathclyde and the University of the West of Scotland.

This report summarises examples of positive practice and areas for development as highlighted in the ELIR Outcome Reports (see pages 1-3), and the more detailed findings included within the ELIR Technical Reports (see below). It is possible that additional practice takes place in these 18 institutions, but only those elements of practice included within the

ELIR reports is included here. The report then outlines briefly the next steps in the ELIR process following the publication of the reports.

The annex includes references to transitions into university within the ELIR Technical Reports. The paragraph numbers used in the annex are taken directly from the original reports.

Areas highlighted in the ELIR Thematic Reports

In ELIR 3, each Outcome Report sets out the ELIR team's views of positive practice and areas for development at the institution. These key findings in relation to transitions into university are summarised on pages 1-3 of this report. This section identifies current interesting practice at the 18 institutions as identified in the longer ELIR Technical Reports.

Activity to promote good practice

This section identifies current interesting practice at the 18 institutions as identified in the ELIR Technical Reports.

Articulation

The University of Aberdeen's strategic plan identifies targets for widening participation through flexible entry routes and increasing the number of programmes offering further education articulation routes by 30 per cent. The number of students progressing to the University through articulation agreements has increased considerably over the past three years, while the University has established a number of new articulation arrangements with college sector institutions in Scotland.

Further to this, during the time of its review, the University was exploring potential new 2+2 articulation partners in India, Sri Lanka, China, Kazakhstan and Malaysia.

Abertay University offers a range of activities and services specifically designed to aid the transition of non-traditional students including pre-transitional and post-transitional support for students and support for partner staff. The range of pre-transitional support includes: the college-based degree adviser system and two summer preparation bridging programmes (University Preparation, Abertay College Transition) for students entering the University from college. Once enrolled, ongoing post-transition support for articulating students is provided through the Support Enquiry Zone.

The University of Dundee was awarded additional student numbers for 2013 entry by the Scottish Funding Council to support widening access and articulation.

The University of Edinburgh does not have any formal articulation agreements with other colleges, although it has an ambition to introduce further flexibility into its degree pathways through closer working with strategic partners and through direct entry to year two for undergraduate students.

Edinburgh Napier University has 240 formal articulation agreements with eight colleges in Scotland and 29 formal articulation routes with international partners from eight countries. In 2013 an Associate Student Scheme was established to strengthen the University's approach to articulation. Edinburgh Napier is a member of the Edinburgh, Lothians, Fife and Borders Regional Articulation Hub (ELRAH). In 2013-14, 887 new undergraduate entrants joined the University from Scottish colleges; in 2014-15, 565 students entered the University with advanced standing. For students entering through a formal articulation route, there are a range of pre-entry interventions on offer, including drop-in lectures, team teaching with college staff, campus visits and the use of social media. A Coming from College resource

can be accessed through the University's virtual learning environment and is open for any student to self-enrol. This online support tool is designed to help college students negotiate the transition from college to university, and provides additional signposting to relevant services, such as employer mentoring, study abroad and study skills support.

Edinburgh Napier University staff work with college students from the time at which they begin their college studies, and students articulating from college partners are given Associate Student status, where they are able to drop in on normal timetabled University lectures to give them a first-hand insight into different teaching styles that they may expect. On arrival, Student and Academic Services signpost college students to relevant services, including study skills support. The progress of students joining the University through articulation routes is monitored, with progression and retention being reviewed. Project work in this area is currently being funded as part of the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme.

Glasgow Caledonian University has seen a significant increase in the number of Higher National Certificate and Diploma (HNC/D) students articulating into years two and three of its undergraduate programmes, from 490 in full-time education in 2011-12 to 834 in 2012-13. The Scottish Funding Council also awarded the University an additional 157 articulation places for the 2013-14 academic year. Support for transition from the colleges into the University is provided through the University's College Connect Academy. Data suggests that the University increased the proportion of entrants from a disadvantaged background from 32 per cent of the total student population to 34 per cent in 2014. By 2015-16 the University hopes to have articulating students representing a third of the total undergraduate intake.

Heriot-Watt University has a new associate student programme that guarantees a place for students completing courses in partner colleges. The new programme and existing articulation routes will increase the number of articulating students from around 55 in 2011-12 to approximately 160 in 2015-16.

The University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) has a large number of students articulating onto UHI programmes after studying further education or Higher National awards. UHI has a range of access routes including traditional routes, Access to HE and articulation. The programme structure at the University is flexible and employs a 1+2 and 2+1 arrangements in some subject areas with articulation arrangements to support widening access.

Queen Margaret University was a founding member of the Lothian Equal Access Programme for Schools (LEAPS) and engages in a number of widening participation initiatives. The East Lothian Hospitality and Tourism Academy, of which the University is a managing partner, supports articulation into higher education. More academies were about to be launched according to the University's ELIR report. Eight per cent of full-time entrants to the University articulate from an HNC or HND. Further to this in 2012-13, 13 per cent of Scottish domiciled-students from the twenty most deprived areas as measured by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), 15 per cent were direct entry students and 17 per cent were from low progression schools.

Robert Gordon University (RGU) has a number of articulation arrangements including North East Scotland College (NESCOL) and Dundee and Angus College, overseen by the Department of Learning, Teaching and Access (DELTA). The number of student entering through articulation has increased from 892 in 2010-11 to 1,339 in 2014-15. Through the International College at RGU (ICGRU) the University provides dedicated articulation pathways for international students. DELTA also provides support services for students entering through articulation pathways, such as one to one and small group support,

generic skills workshops, and online self-study resources. DELTA is also responsible for the coordination of the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme, which has been linked to their responsibilities regarding widening access and articulation. Through DELTA's analytics team, the institution has advanced data sets, which can provide information regarding articulating students' performance against other groups. Review of such data has helped inform work to support distinct groups, for example transitions work with students' articulating from ICGRU).

Furthermore, the North East Articulation Hub initiative, funded by the Scottish Funding Council, is a partnership between the University and NESCOL to promote and support enhancement in articulation through activities at disciplinary level, such as an Associate Student Scheme designed to assist prospective articulating students to become familiar with RGU prior to entry.

The Technical Report relating to the review of Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) highlights that SRUC has chosen to develop fully integrated tertiary provision, with a view to maximising the opportunities for articulation and progression. SRUC's legacy colleges had a number of articulation agreements in place with colleges across Scotland, and SRUC has indicated that it was in the process of renegotiating these agreements with the newly formed regional colleges. The ELIR report identifies flexible entry and seamless progression as defining characteristics of SRUC, and the institution is committed to improving the number and range of such opportunities for learners.

The University of Stirling has a number of articulation arrangements, including an established partnership with the local college sector institution, Forth Valley College. In September 2015, the first cohort of 42 students from this partnership made the transition into year three in two of the integrated programmes. The ELIR team noted the careful planning that had gone into this activity and the strong desire to ensure a smooth transition for students.

The University of Strathclyde has been developing international articulation routes, such as the provision of facilitated entry to the third year of undergraduate programmes for students from partner institutions in countries such as China, India, Malaysia and Pakistan. The University is engaged effectively in local outreach and widening participation, with new initiatives to promote advanced entry to level 2 or 3 of undergraduate programmes being developed across all faculties, in collaboration with schools and further education colleges. The aim of the initiative is to break down the barriers for college students articulating to higher education and enhance skills in this student group. The University has stated its aim to increase articulation in the local area further, as evidenced in its updated Widening Access strategy, which includes plans for a 30 per cent increase in the number of entrants from local colleges by the 2015-16 academic year.

The Technical Report relating to the review of University of St Andrews states that articulation is not a common entry route into the University, although there are a small number of agreements with local colleges, such as the Perth College Pathway to Medicine, and agreements with Fife College and Dundee and Angus College, allowing HNC-qualified applicants direct entry into the second year of a BSc.

The Technical Report relating to the review of the University of the West of Scotland indicates that the institution has the highest percentage of students articulating from further into higher education, and the highest proportion of students from the SIMD 20 areas in Scotland (with over 22 per cent of the University's Scottish full-time student population coming from SIMD 20 areas). In addition, partnerships with the college sector have resulted in an increase in the number of students entering the University with advanced standing, from 1,172 students in 2010-11 to 1,219 students in 2012-14, the latter representing nearly

12 per cent of all full-time undergraduate entrants. Potential articulating students are provided with pre-entry advice, and an induction programme is run for those students entering with advance standing. The University has also been supporting the definition of the learner pathways from college to the University. Students on a learner pathway, irrespective of whether they are on a specific articulation route, can be associate students of the University, a status that allows them access to University learning resources.

Widening access

The University of Aberdeen established a widening participation working group in February 2013 to develop a framework to promote widening participation from pre-application to post-graduation. Related to this, the University is developing partnership working to engage with school pupils at an early stage of their school career, in order to raise aspirations and attainment.

As a strategic priority, Abertay University aims to increase the proportion of undergraduate entrants from widening participation backgrounds, and increase the number of Scottish-domiciled students articulating into the University by 27 per cent. In 2015-16 Abertay University exceeded its targets for admission of Scottish-domiciled students from SIMD 40 (35 per cent of student population) backgrounds and students entering with advanced standing (34 per cent of student population).

The University of Dundee delivers a number of outreach initiatives aimed at widening participation, including its 'Discovering degrees' programme for pupils from low progression secondary schools and the Dundee University Access to Learning (DUAL) Summer School, which is particularly aimed at MD40 students, and helps to prepare and qualify applicants for entry to a range of undergraduate programmes by providing academic and study skills support.

The Technical Report relating to the review of the University of Edinburgh highlighted the effective approach taken by the institution to widen access, such as innovative outreach, contextualised admissions, bursary provision and flexible entry routes into degree programmes. The report noted that the University has exceeded its Scottish Funding Council Outcome Agreement target on widening participation.

The Technical Report relating to the review of University of Glasgow notes the University's successful track record of recruiting and supporting widening participation students, due to its use of contextual admissions and the range of initiatives in place to support the induction of students. The Report also indicates that students who had participated in the Top-Up programme, which helps secondary students to develop academic skills in support of their transition to and retention in higher education, were very positive about the support they received. Students who attended the Summer School or the Top-Up programme have higher continuation rates than those MD20/40 students who have not attended any pre-entry programmes. The University has now also developed the MD40 Group, which draws its membership from both academic and student-facing service areas of the University, to promote an integrated approach to supporting the success of widening participation students. The group is looking at a range of monitoring and intervention strategies specifically for the MD40 cohort.¹

The Technical Report relating to the review of Glasgow Caledonian University's identified the successful promotion of widening participation and student transitions as a positive practice. This has been demonstrated through its progression and retention data and by the University's range of activities such as the College Connect Strategy, which is designed to

¹ Enhancement-led Institutional Review 2013-14 Case Studies (University of Glasgow), available at: www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_298620_en.pdf (PDF, 2.54MB).

enhance and support students entering University from college. The Caledonian Club, which is organised by the University, provides targeted community engagement. The University also provides contextualised student support through its Learning Development Centres.

Glasgow School of Art has recently appointed a progression manager to support its strategy to increase the numbers of non-traditional students progressing into the School from further education colleges. The Technical Report relating to the review of Heriot-Watt University notes that the institution has created two new posts to support recruitment, transition and induction for students admitted through widening participation routes.

Widening access is fundamental to the University of the Highlands and Islands' mission. The University has a proactive and multifaceted approach to widening access, which also includes continued support once students are admitted. The Wider Access Framework 2015 sets out the University's approach to widening access and is 'mainstreamed' at the institution. Widening participation is supported through a range activities, such as active networks with schools and colleges and effective use of recognition of prior learning. The Wider Access Framework indicates that widening participation is at the heart of UHI school liaison activity. Through the UHI Regional Schools Group and the UHI school liaison activity, the institution identifies schools with lower progression to higher education and prioritises engagement with them. The UHI Regional Schools Group aims to develop and oversee the delivery of a partnership-wide strategy for increasing further and higher education curriculum offered to schools within the region.

Furthermore, the University of the Highlands and Islands encourages applications from prospective students who may not have standard qualifications through recognition of prior learning. The University receives over 400 recognition of prior learning applications each academic year.

Robert Gordon University has well-established widening participation links and activities, managed by the Department of Learning, Teaching and Access (DELTA). DELTA delivers a range of outreach strategies and collaborative initiatives, specifically designed to support non-traditional students. Activities include ACCESS RGU, which delivers outreach activities with local schools and communities including advice and guidance for applicants, teachers, parents, and enrolling students; and partnerships with local colleges (NESCOL and Dundee and Angus College) intended to maximise the impact of articulation and other pathways as a way to support access to students from MD20/MD40 areas in the region. The number of students entering from MD20/MD40 areas has risen from 230 in 2014-15 to 274 in 2016-17. The ELIR Technical Report notes that the University's approach to engagement with the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme demonstrates an active commitment to foregrounding the University's commitment to widening participation.

At the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in 2013-13 22 per cent of the undergraduate students and 28 per cent of postgraduates were recruited from SIMD 20 and SIMD 40 backgrounds. Processes are in place for admitting students who are outstanding performers but have not met the usual academic entry criteria. The Conservatoire's strategic plan also embraces institutional policy relating to widening access and lifelong learning as well as equality and diversity. There is evidence that students from a wide variety of backgrounds and learning support needs are enabled to make the transition to study at the Conservatoire. In discussion with the ELIR team, students reported a strong sense of community within the institution, indicating that diversity was 'part of the norm' and that there were no barriers to access or inclusion. The ELIR Technical Report also noted that the Conservatoire actively welcomes applications from mature students and students with additional learning support needs, with a range of specialist staff available to provide support to specific groups of students. A range of positive activities were also noted in the ELIR Technical Report,

such as the Conservatoire's work with Solar Bear Deaf Youth Theatre to develop training pathways for deaf actors.

To ensure that the University of Strathclyde's ambitious targets for widening participation are consistently met, from 2013-14 the institution is using contextual data in admissions. Such data include the applicant's postcode, their school to higher education progression rate, as well as their care background. This information is drawn both from application forms and publicly available datasets, and is used to ensure that the context in which qualifications were obtained is appropriately understood and considered throughout the admission process.

The University of St Andrews' positive approach to widening participation and equality and diversity were noted as areas of positive practice in the ELIR Outcome Reports.

The University runs a number of 'gateway' programmes for students who do not meet the minimum entry requirements due to educational disadvantage. These programmes offer additional tuition to students and, upon successful completion, students can enter a Physics and/or Computing Science degree. The University increased the number of scholarships and bursaries given to entrants from 79 in 2009-10 to 321 in 2013-14. Financial aid and other support is targeted to those students with the greatest financial need. During the 2015 ELIR visit, students who had entered from articulation and widening participation backgrounds indicated that the support they had received during their transition into the University was effective and that the variety of programmes for support met their needs. A number of academic schools offer specific outreach programmes within low progression schools, providing support with UCAS applications, personal statements and aspiration-raising. The University also offers an evening degree programme, where a number of places are allocated for students entering through the Scottish Wider Access Programme, offering a flexible route to a general degree. Students who enter the University from a further education articulation or an access route are provided with dedicated mentoring for their first year through a peer mentoring system and an access-aware Adviser of Studies. The University's work with people leaving care or living in caring contexts has been recognised through the Buttle Quality Mark.

Retention

At the University of Aberdeen, non-continuation rates and first year retention rates have both improved. The University uses the Personal Tutor System to support students and promote their retention. The University's 2011-15 Strategic Plan sets a target of improving overall retention rates to four per cent better than the University's benchmark figure.

The Technical Report relating to the review of Abertay University noted that retention of SIMD 20 students has increased with 11 per cent over the past two years and there have been improvements for SIMD 40 and 60.

The University of Edinburgh's ELIR report noted that the University's retention rate for widening participation students was the same as for the student cohort as a whole. The University outperformed the Scottish and UK sector average on this measure.

At Heriot-Watt University, there are plans to introduce an institutional retention strategy and incorporate this into the learning and teaching strategy, having identified retention as a key priority area.

The University of the Highlands and Islands' retention rates are significantly improved since the 2012 ELIR, reflecting positive steps taken to enhance the student experience and improve data integrity and reporting. UHI is performing above the Scottish average benchmark for some student groups in regards to retention in full-time degree students.

The ELIR Technical Report notes the variety of action being taken to address non-continuation including ensuring good support structures are in place for students, longitudinal induction, monitoring student study activity, and ensuring that curriculum design supports student retention.

The Technical Report relating to the review of Robert Gordon University notes that the University uses key data sets effectively to monitor its performance in relation to retention, student population and other key performance indicators.

Admission, pre-entry and induction

Abertay University has operated a contextualised admissions process since 2014-15 and has links with Tayside and Fife Articulation Hub. The University is considering what further enhancements could be made to increase the diversity of the student population and how local barriers to entry can be overcome for students from under-represented groups.

Before a student enrolls at the University of Dundee, applicants are given access to the University's virtual learning environment, email system and student management system, to provide them with generic and subject-specific information and advice. The University's 'Welcome Week' is designed to support students in their transition to higher education through a variety of social and other events, with tailored induction and orientation events at school and college level. Postgraduate and international students also participate in their own specific induction events.

The University of Edinburgh is using the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme to continue a focus on induction for new students and continuing induction for existing students. The University also holds a 'Gearing up for induction' event, which enables academic and support staff from across the institution to come together to focus on student induction alongside the students association. The ELIR report also noted the positive comments from postgraduate students on their induction to the University.

During the review of Edinburgh Napier University, students said that support services were embedded at induction, and that support services were well signposted and available through the University's intranet. A recent review of the University's Admissions Policy resulted in plans to implement a contextual admissions policy from 2016. Other widening participation initiatives include supporting care leavers and the MD20 students' two-week pre-entry scheme. International students are also supported in a number of ways, with English language provision offered to students whose first language is not English.

The Technical Report relating to the review of Glasgow Caledonian University identified that research students receive specific induction, along with development workshops and research writing skills support. The University's Outreach and Community Engagement department deliver a number of programmes, including the Advanced Higher Hub, to support transition from schools to higher education. The Hub delivers advanced higher awards to senior school pupils from the University's partner schools and is based on the University's Glasgow campus. The Hub provides pupils with full access to the University's facilities and gives them the chance to experience student life, which will aid them should they go on to attend university.

Heriot-Watt University has recently redeveloped induction for advanced entry students, to address their needs more fully, and created two new posts to support recruitment, transition and induction for students admitted through widening participation routes.

The University of the Highlands and Islands reviewed the overall process of admissions, which led to a revised admissions policy, process and regulations. The key outcome of the review was a contextualised admissions policy, which will be implemented for 2017-18.

The University identifies admissions policy and practices to be vital aspects of widening access.

Queen Margaret University provides various pre-entry and induction programmes to support students from widening participation groups, such as QMAvance, QMAssist, QMConnect and MentorNet. QMAvance is a three-day orientation programme particularly aimed at widening participation students; QMAssist is an induction programme for direct entrants; and QMConnect and MentorNet, run by Student Services, are face-to-face and online mentoring schemes. The University also hosts an international induction day prior to the start of the general induction week. The Effective Learning Service also offers international students support in English language through a four-week, pre-session course. The University has a Transition and Induction working group to oversee its induction processes. There are several elements to the University's approach, including an induction website, the use of continuing students as helpers throughout Induction Week, and mentoring through QMConnect.

Robert Gordon University provides various pre-entry and induction programmes to support students from widening participation routes and international students. Through the North East Articulation Hub initiative, the University has a partnership with NESCOL, a key of feature of which is the use of guaranteed places through which students commencing a qualification at NESCOL can understand the requirements for articulation to the University. Robert Gordon University also makes use of contextualised admissions to support the entry of widening participation students. Furthermore, the University offers tailored induction programmes that consider the needs of international, widening participation, as well as other groups of students. The University also provides an enhanced induction programme for students who are articulating from link colleges.

The ELIR Technical Report of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland noted that it actively welcomes applications from mature students and from students with additional learning support needs. Students have access to a range of specialist staff covering areas including international student support. Once identified, additional support needs are set out in each student's Learning Agreement. Entry with advanced standing, for example where students already have Higher National qualifications, is not currently a significant admissions route.

In 2008 the University of Stirling agreed a student handbook template, which schools are encouraged to use and which provides links to the policies and procedures to ensure that the most up-to-date version is used and consistency is maintained across schools. Students who met the ELIR team indicated that they were satisfied with the accuracy of the information they had received about their programmes before and after admission. Students also confirmed they receive a range of helpful handbooks.

In meetings with the ELIR team, University of Strathclyde students commented very positively on the quality of their induction programmes. The University plans to strengthen support for international students by expanding the range of pre-arrival information provided to prospective international students. The buddying system recently introduced in Psychology was cited as a successful initiative that could be replicated in other departments.

International students

Abertay University provide support for articulating students whose first language is not English through the Support Enquiry Zone.

The International College at Robert Gordon University (ICRGU) is an important entry route for international students. International students at the University benefit from a tailored induction programmes, which covers academic and pastoral dimensions in recognition of the international student transition.

SRUC produces helpful pre-entry guides to provide EU and other international applicants with pre-arrival information. Specialist support is also available to international students on one specific programme, and all international students are able to access the support services provided by the wider learning and teaching teams.

In addition to the articulation arrangements with international institutions, the University of Strathclyde launched the Strathclyde International Study Centre. The Centre is based in Glasgow and at the time of the 2014 ELIR review there were 73 students studying on foundation programmes designed to prepare international students for entry to undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes.

The University of St Andrews provides a variety of English Language Teaching programmes for students who are not native English speakers. There is also provision for students to learn about the cultural and philosophical basis for academic policies and what this means in practice within a Scottish higher education institution. The Students' Association of the University hosts an International Students' Reception and offers events hosted by student societies featuring a wide diversity of groups.

Areas for development

While there were examples of positive practice relating to transitions into university provided in the ELIR Technical Reports, a number of areas for development were also identified.

This section of the paper outlines the areas for development identified relating to transitions into university in a higher education institution in the ELIR Technical Reports. There are areas of overlap between the issues highlighted below.

Articulation

The Technical Report relating to the review of the University of the West of Scotland notes the University's plans to have a phased reduction in the amount of articulating students and asks the University to consider the potential impact of this change on its widening participation policy, particularly given the institution's success in providing education to many traditionally 'difficult to reach' student groups.

Retention

The Technical Report relating to the review of the University of Aberdeen noted that, at the time of the 2014 ELIR visit, the University did not monitor the non-continuation rates for part-time students. Senior staff acknowledged that this should become part of the annual data, and the University was encouraged to progress these plans. The ELIR Outcome Report also recommended that the University should consider the access for part-time students to student support services, such as the Student Learning Service, out of core hours.

The Technical Report relating to the review of the University of Highlands and Islands noted the positive activities being undertaken by the University to improve non-continuation, however, encourages the University to develop an explicit institution-wide strategic approach to addressing the challenges of non-continuation.

At the Scotland's Rural College (SRUC), data on student progression is considered at individual programme level within SRUC, however, at the time of the 2014 ELIR, there was limited consideration at institutional level to inform admissions and student support arrangements.

Admission, pre-entry and induction

The Technical Report relating to the review of Heriot-Watt University says that during the review, the review team heard about postgraduate research students who had missed the University's formal induction programme, having joined the University in the middle of the academic year. The ELIR team recommended that all postgraduate research students should receive effective and consistent induction irrespective of when and where they commence their studies.

The Technical Report relating to the review of Queen Margaret University noted the positive aspect of the various pre-entry and induction programmes that the University provided, such as QMAvance, QMAssist, QMConnect and MentorNet. Students who experienced the pre-entry and induction programmes gave positive feedback about the support, however they would have appreciated more course specific information.

International students

The Technical Report relating to the review of Scotland's Rural College noted that the institution would need to ensure it has systematic arrangements for identifying additional specialist support to meet the particular needs of international students at all of its campuses, particularly if international student numbers increased as intended.

What happens next?

QAA Scotland follows up the ELIR outcomes with institutions individually through annual discussion visits, and each institution is required to produce a Follow-up Report indicating how it has addressed its own ELIR outcomes. QAA Scotland also promotes collaborative working between institutions to share good practice and to find collective solutions to common areas for development. Each institution is invited to participate in a follow-up event to engage with the ways other institutions that were reviewed at around the same point of the ELIR cycle have addressed their review outcomes.

Index of references to Transitions into University in the ELIR 3 Technical Reports

A link to each institution's ELIR 3 Technical Report is included in the left-hand column. Paragraph numbers are indicated in the middle column.

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