

Graduate Attributes Spotlight

Induction and Transition

The vast majority of undergraduates join the University straight from secondary school. A common source of dissatisfaction amongst first years is that the autonomy required for successful University learning feels unfamiliar and uncomfortable after years of didactic, rote memorisation of factual content.

However, students respond much better to this if they can see a clear reason and purpose behind it. Using graduate attributes as a lens to explain our learning and assessment practices can be a useful way of adjusting students' expectations to engage with the realities of university life. This same approach can be harnessed in later years to support students in negotiating transitions between early years and honours study, or indeed undergraduate and postgraduate study.

Overview

This spotlight paper covers two pivotal stages in the student learner journey: [Induction](#) into first year and the [Transition](#) into honours level study.

Induction

Semester 1 is of vital importance to new students settling within the university environment. A common cause identified by first year students who had considered dropping out is a feeling that university 'wasn't for them' - the subject material seemed too sophisticated, or the environment too alienating. However, these early concerns often fade away in time: it's crucial therefore that we address students' concerns and expectations early. Framing your induction talks around graduate attributes can help:

1. Introduce your students to the concept of graduate attributes: explain that graduate attributes represent the transferable value of a degree – the desirable, skills, personal qualities and abilities which will make them employable in a variety of careers after university, as well as excellent researchers if they decide to carry on their studies post-graduation.
2. Draw links between developing the attributes and how learning, teaching and assessment is organised within your course (and specifically, how it differs from secondary school learning). For example, when talking about the need to be resourceful and responsible, you might:
 - Highlight the importance of developing the ability to self-direct one's learning and find relevant resources as an essential study skill for university learning.
 - Explain that this approach may be quite different to what they've been used to at school (where resources were often simply handed to them) and that it may seem a little intimidating at first – they might even feel overwhelmed and worry that they're not cut out for university.
 - Reassure your students that it's ok to struggle at first. Explain that over the coming years the programme will continue to support them to do more and more for themselves (e.g. limited prescribed reading lists will

Approach

be replaced with more general bibliographies etc).

- Help them to understand **why** – explain how this will not only make them a better student, but give examples of how the attribute is useful within the world of work too (e.g. employers want staff who can work independently and get on with the job, take initiative) and that these sophisticated attributes are why graduates are highly employable.

Above all, remember to stress that they're not alone. Everyone will feel their abilities being tested to some degree at first – they should feel challenged, but not out of their depth. Make sure to point students to useful resources on campus – their lecturers and tutors, subject librarians, the Student Learning Service, the SRC Advice Centre and any relevant online exercises.

Transition

The challenges involved in moving between second year and junior honours study can be just as disorientating for students as first year induction, particularly as the progression involves a narrowing of professional identity in many cases – moving from multiple subjects to a single speciality. You may wish to consider adapting the following model for a junior honours induction programme:

- I. Hold a more in-depth form of the induction talk outlined above towards the end of the second year to attract students to study within your discipline. Give greater emphasis to your graduates' employability – bring in information about the more specific opportunities that your specialisation opens up through alumni destination data (you may wish to involve alumni in teaching).
- II. Bring groups of final year students and intending-honours students together in a tutor-facilitated peer-assisted learning (PAL) discussion forum. Use the tutors to prompt initial discussion with topics such as:
 - What experiences have been most significant for your development of graduate attributes in the last two years?
 - What challenges did you encounter in the move from second year to junior honours?
 - What advice would you give the new honours cohort to ensure they succeed in their studies?
 - What advice would you give to them to ensure that they make the most of their remaining time at the University?
- III. Capture the key points with a plenary summary discussion. Identify the most important actions that the second year students should take to prepare themselves for honours study over the summer break.

Done correctly, this model for supporting honours transition should have benefits for both your second year and final year students:

1. The enthusiasm of your honours students will engage uncertain second year students who have not yet committed to studying within your discipline
2. All second year students will benefit from the advice of their experienced peers, better preparing them for the demands of honours level study
3. The process should enable your final year students to reflect back on their

<p>formative experiences in a natural and engaging way, preparing them for the level of self-awareness required in graduate recruitment processes</p>	
<p>Quality Enhancement Themes: <i>Transition to and During the First Year</i> https://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/docs/ethemes/the-first-year/transition-to-and-during-first-year.pdf The Student Learning Service https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/leads/students/ The Careers Service https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/careers/</p>	<p>Resources</p>