LTDF Large Project Bid

**Project Title:** An on-line model for alternative Pre-entry student support and engagement. Articulating course expectations, aiming to impact on access, confidence and retention.

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**Other Contributors:**
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**Summary:**

It has been recognized that first year students are particularly vulnerable and at risk of ‘drop-out’ due to the changes and pressures inherent with starting a Higher Education course (Lowe and Cook, 2003). This project proposes that this ‘risk’ could be reduced by more flexible access and preparation before students start their undergraduate course. The proposed on-line model creates a method of increasing pre-entry engagement in the summer before the start of a student’s course. Active participation in the course will allow students to experience a challenging up-to-date learning environment and to come into structured contact with university staff as well as other students in a similar position.

The flexibility inherent in the on-line delivery will allow greater access and greater variation in delivery and learning methods, all integral parts of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy. In addition the continuing evaluation and collaboration between the staff and students on the course content, timing etc. will create an adaptable model delivering appropriate learning experiences, based on the Moodle VLE. It is hoped that such exposure, with open communication with staff throughout, will help increase the students feeling of preparedness and confidence for starting their undergraduate course.

This project aims to develop an accessible and flexible model for online delivery and learning within the latest version of Moodle (version 2.4). Continual evaluation will lead to the creation of a robust learning experience raising a student’s awareness of undergraduate course expectations and delivery methods helping to smooth the transition into Higher Education. These outcomes will increase the accessibility of the developed resources; introduce novel teaching approaches, measures and assessments; with the measure of success being better prepared students and reducing the risks associated with student ‘drop-out’. All lessons learned will be openly available across the institution.

**Aims and Outcomes:**

This project aims to develop an on-line pilot course, targeted at nursing students in the first instance, allowing for an open and readily accessible means of pre-entry student engagement. The University of Glasgow’s Summer School runs over 6 weeks preparing students for their university career but is only available to a relatively small number of local students. This number
may be increasing in this current academic year but the campus based activities limit the numbers that are able to attend. In addition the University’s Nursing course uses the Summer School by requiring students to achieve a B grade to confirm their place on the undergraduate course. Unfortunately the requirement to attend and the associated travel, accommodation costs, creates an immediate barrier for prospective students. Anecdotal evidence gathered by talking to potential nursing students appears to show that this barrier stops students applying to the University of Glasgow.

An alternative means of accessing the material would boost student involvement, creating a flexible alternative for student engagement before the start of their studies. This, freely accessible on-line course introducing students to the concepts and methods of delivery and assessment, would help increase student preparedness and confidence.

Aims:
- Develop an adaptive model for on-line engagement with students within the latest version of Moodle (version 2.4). This will initially be targeted at prospective nursing students. Continual evaluation will lead to the creation of a robust learning experience raising a student’s awareness of undergraduate course expectations and delivery methods helping to address the transition into Higher Education.
- The on-line nature of this model will ensure that the course and resources are adaptive and freely available to everyone, expanding the access and usefulness of such a model.
- Evaluate electronic means of implementing recognized learning approaches. E.g., Peer review can be achieved through the Aropa system (http://www.dcs.gla.ac.uk/~hcp/aropa/aropa-introduction.pdf). Implementation through a system like this can be evaluated for ease of use, engagement and perceived learning benefits.
- Use student and staff questionnaires and focus groups (possibly on-line) to determine the best course structure and timing to create an adaptable online learning model.

Intended Impact:
- All resources, and the experiences gathered by the developers, will be made freely available across the institution.
- Any common questions, themes, misunderstandings, perceptions by the prospective students will be passed back to RIO to inform student information resources.
- The aim is to positively introduce prospective students to university level learning experiences and structures.
- The flexibility inherent in the on-line delivery will allow greater access and greater variation in delivery methods. This also allows for a blended approach to synchronous and asynchronous tasks to allow the widest possible engagement options for the students involved. The continuing evaluation and collaboration between the staff and students on the course content, timing etc. will create an adaptable model delivering appropriate learning experiences.
- This pre-entry course will give students an awareness of the Moodle VLE they will encounter in their first year courses at the University of Glasgow, another aid to help smooth the transition into their first year of study
- An alternative means of accessing the material would boost student involvement, creating a flexible alternative for student engagement before the start of their studies. This, freely
accessible on-line course introducing students to the concepts and methods of delivery and assessment, would help increase student preparedness and confidence.

- It is hoped that such an experience will allow students to build a network of support from their peers and university staff to help make the transition to undergraduate study less daunting and ultimately a much more successful and positive experience.
- A successful outcome from this model would ultimately involve the students who engage with the course continuing their involvement in subsequent years and perhaps acting in the role of ‘mentor’ or ‘ambassador’ for the next year of students.

**Previous Work:**
The main influences contributing to a students’ attitude towards their potential success in their course have been identified (Yorke, 2000). These include:

- Inability to cope with the course demands.
- Wrong choice of course.
- Dissatisfaction with institutional provision.

These could be rebadged under the heading ‘unsure of course expectations and delivery’. Activities like the Summer School help to clarify the intended learning outcomes for a course introducing the students to university teaching and assessment methods. However this only reaches a small number of students each year. It is possible to adapt the experience gained from the Summer School into a flexible, collaborative, and ultimately challenging on-line activity.

It has been suggested that first year students are the most vulnerable cohort in terms of non-completion (Lowe and Cook, 2003) but also the most receptive to e-learning (Parry, 2007) so it is appropriate, and arguably of the most benefit to target students in the summer before their studies begin.

Bain (2004) outlines the key ingredients that should be actively incorporated into any learning scenario to encourage best delivery in teaching. These include:

1. Fostering student engagement
2. Stimulating intellectual development
3. Building rapport with your students

There are various tools and software packages available to address these key themes and these tend to have been looked at in isolation. It is recognized that the success of these all require constant involvement of staff. Less attention has been paid to creating a complete learning environment that is as preparatory for undergraduate study as a physical, multi-week course (Brinthaupt, T.M., 2011). Brinthaupt (2011) also stresses that student-staff interaction is paramount to successful engagement with any course. The tools are available to include flexible and varied modes of delivery; peer discussion and review; group tasks; message boards; ‘live’ chats; rapid online assessment and feedback. This project would carefully evaluate the learning benefits of such activities, rather than focusing on particular versions of software, to determine their usefulness and ultimately the ideal time to introduce each throughout a course.

**References:**


Methodology:
The existing Summer School courses run through the University of Glasgow are well established and consistently receive very positive feedback from the participants. It is worth noting that the Summer School course coordinators will all be involved in the development of this on-line course ensuring appropriate content and delivery. During the 2013 Summer school, at short notice, it was agreed to create online resources and activities for 4 distance students. These resources are currently being trialled and will help inform this project.

The contacts mentioned at the start of this bid have a wealth of IT experience, subject specific knowledge, and experience of using Moodle to facilitate the running of educational programmes.

July 2013 – September 2013
- Evaluate online resources and activities developed for the biology, chemistry and study skills courses in the 2013 Summer School. No of hits for each resource as well as specific student responses to the evaluation questionnaire will be used for this evaluation.
- Draft an initial ‘draft’ online course using the lessons learned from the 2013 Summer School. This will be the foundation that subsequent development work can build on.

September – December 2013
- Application for institutional ethics approval.
- Research new technologies being employed for on-line learning models for possible inclusion in the course.
- Identify new, nursing specific material for adaptation to on-line delivery.
- Engage with the Recruitment and International Office (RIO) to ensure the on-line course is made available to students at the most appropriate time.

December – February 2014
- Recruitment of a research assistant.
- Continue to develop and evaluate the on-line course accounting for the feedback received from the test groups and appropriate research findings.
- Adapt the nursing specific material for on-line delivery.
- Continue to engage with the Recruitment and International Office (RIO) to ensure the on-line course is made available to appropriate students at the most appropriate time.

February – April 2014
- Create the on-line course in Moodle (version 2.4). This course will provide clear links to the existing Moodle courses available for undergraduate students.
- Create in course assessments, both formative and summative, delivered through Moodle. These assessments will be agreed upon by the course coordinators prior to the course going live.
- Pilot and evaluate the course content using Graduate Teaching Assistants and current undergraduate students. This might be limited due to budget but will help assess ease of access to the course and its resources.
• Pilot with the nursing course in the first instance.

February 2014-August 2014
• Ensure all participating students have active Moodle logins.
• Evaluate student perceptions of Higher Education study through questionnaires and, where possible, focus groups (perhaps on-line discussion groups).
• The physical summer school begins and runs for six weeks.
• Attending students are asked their opinion on Higher Education study through questionnaires and focus groups.
• On-line course goes live and students’ progress through the course.
• Regular staff contact on a scheduled basis (live chat or response to e-mail)
• Evaluate student perceptions on activities/Assessment as they are completed.

August 2014-December 2014
• Evaluation of student feedback and learning outcomes. Comparison of student feedback from on-line course and physical summer school attendance.
• Further development of on-line course in line with evaluation outcomes. It is hoped that both the on-line and the campus courses will change as a result of this evaluation.
• Further piloting of course content using Graduate Teaching Assistants and undergraduate students.

September 2014-December 2014
• Creation of a Biology/Chemistry specific resource for level 1 students who have no previous or current qualification and wish to better prepare themselves before beginning their undergraduate course. This resource will build on the lessons learned from the pilot for Nursing students.
• Creation of an adaptable template to be made available as an open educational resource. This template will showcase areas of best practise, highlight potential pitfalls and include resources on how various learning technologies can be employed.
• A subsequent, smaller bid, will be submitted to help continue the work.

Potential Applicability/Transferability:
There are multiple ways that the information from this project can be disseminated.

Internally: University of Glasgow Learning and Teaching Conference
University of Glasgow Education Committees
Recruitment and International Office.

Externally: All resources made available as open educational resources
Bid to host a seminar event (e.g. HEA)
Other conferences and/or events and publications

The resulting model/template would be adaptable across disciplines and institutions. All resources will be made available across the sector as open educational resources. All experiences gathered with the creation of this model will be reported and freely accessible.
With a focus on recognised positive learning pedagogies rather than specific software packages the model would be of interest to any department hoping to expand their on-line provision.
On-line access in this way will also play a useful part in clarifying the institutions expectations and delivery methods. This could prove useful on a local, national and international level by increasing prospective student’s awareness of the detail expected at an undergraduate level.
Evaluation:
Evaluation will take place through multiple cycles of piloting and evaluation of the on-line activities. This evaluation will involve GTAs, current undergraduate students, staff and summer school students. The details and timing of these evaluations are shown in the methodology section.

Timetable:
Timetable information is shown in the methodology section.

Budget:

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<td>(Confirmed through Research and Enterprise Office)</td>
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Dr Chris Finlay