

Dissemination Partner Case Study (2)

Early Childhood Studies, Rolle School of Education, University of Plymouth

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Background

Rolle School of Education run an Early Childhood Studies degree which takes anywhere between 10 and 20 top-up students into the final year. The degree was set-up in 2001 and started with entrants at level one, two and three. The top-up students moving into the final year of the early childhood degree are generally mature students with additional work or family commitments and in some instances both. The three main feeder colleges to the degree are Somerset College of Art and Technology, South Devon College and North Devon College. Early feedback from the top-up students has indicated they really enjoy the degree course. The final year of the degree has been designed to enable students to have a flexible learning timetable and assessment is a 100% coursework there are no exams.

Good Practice

When Rolle School of Education set-up the progression routes from HND to the early childhood top-up degree they also put in place a number of support mechanisms for staff as well as students. The school regularly run staff development days for their Partner Colleges one of which SPAT were involved in earlier in the year. In discussion with staff it was decided that the SPAT materials would be most usefully employed as tools for helping students settle into university life as quickly as possible.

Staff development for FE staff teaching HE

The staff development days run for partner college staff teaching HE have proved very successful, although in some ways they have also highlighted a number of problems that are not readily or easily resolved. For example the teaching loads of FE lecturers teaching HE are much greater than their counter parts at a university and unless individual college policy on teaching loads shifts there is little that could be done to redress the differences. Partner College staff are aware of the differences but are not empowered to make the changes. However the staff development days provide an active forum to discuss these concerns with like-minded colleagues.

Induction for top-up students

A special induction session was set-up for top-up students. The session was on the Thursday and Friday of freshers week. Top-up students were introduced to the general campus facilities such as library and IT suites. They were also given the induction checklist, a list of useful contact numbers and a leaflet on what to expect from university.

Student Evaluation on Induction

A questionnaire was sent out to top-up students to gauge what they felt about the induction process. Most of the responses were positive. When asked did you find the information informative 9 out of 12 answered yes. However there were some areas students identified as in need of improvement, for example earlier notification of module choices and information module content, and additional information on sports and social activities.

Use of Materials

The School of Education used two resources this time:

The Induction Checklist was used to help students settle quickly to university life and encourage them to think about what they needed to sort out early on. In addition to the checklist a list of names with phone numbers and email addresses were included of support and academic staff that students could approach for help.

The Culture Shift Student Flyer was also used to help raise awareness in students of what to expect from university life. It was noted that because of the outside commitments of mature students many had problems engaging in, or immersing themselves in the social as well as academic experience of university life and it was felt that this was an area that would be worked on.

When quizzed on the materials the following suggestions were put forward for improvement:

- They should be condensed and the online material taken out
- The CD appears to have a glitch in it
- Possibly separate out staff and student material
- More information from students
- Need both hard copy and CD to really understand what is available – possibly include a sound bite section on final CD

Customised resources available on SPAT CD and website:

- Induction Checklist
- List of useful contacts
- Culture Shift Student Flyer
- Evaluation Feedback on Induction for Top-up students