

Dissemination Partner Case Study (9)

Plymouth Business School

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Background

Plymouth Business School offer a main progression route from partnership HNDs to stage 3 BA (Hons) Business Administration (BABA). They ask for a minimum 55% merit profile to enter stage 3 – students below this threshold are normally offered stage 2 entry. Most of the intake comes from Plymouth College of Further Education, Exeter College, South Devon College and North Devon College. Plymouth Business School also have academic oversight of HND Sports related programmes which progress to BSc (Hons) Sports Management. This year the business school had 20 “direct entry” students this year and 28 top up students the year before, although they are engaging in a number of new initiatives this year to increase this number.

Good Practice

The Business School has engaged with direct entry students for many years and were able to offer the project a wealth of experience when we first approached them as a partner in January 2002. Their pre-planning and student orientation work was already very impressive so SPAT’s involvement with the department rested largely on our ability to improve and fill in the gaps of an established programme. We also sought to gather as much experience as we could from them and we have identified the following areas of good practice:

Partner College Open Days

The Partner College Open Day provides an opportunity for prospective students to experience University life first hand. It gives them the opportunity to experience “life in Plymouth”, “taster lectures” and to meet other direct entry students – or “student ambassadors”. Part of the programme is funded from widening participation initiatives.

The “Total Top Up Session”

This special Induction session gathers all top up students across a range of courses in Plymouth University and gives them a special Induction involving library skills, careers, a tour of the campus and a special welcome session which involves an Induction Checklist and a general warning to students that “they have two weeks to get organized”.

The “Hello Pack”

This pack is sent to all top up students at the Business School once they have been accepted to the University but before they arrive for Induction. It includes module specific information such as:

- The Course Structure
- The Module Leader
- A Course Outline
- Learning Outcomes
- Lectures
- Workshops
- The Programme Schedule
- Assessment
- Reading and Literature
- Skills Development
- A sample Timetable

Student Nurturing

The Business School also engage with top up students before they arrive at University through Partner College visits, various letters and sometimes personal visits. This, coupled with the organized sessions mentioned above is seen as a “Nurturing Process” for students so that they are ready for University life:

“We believe it is important to work closely with prospective students to orientate them to the University – we nurture them and help them - to feel less intimidated when they arrive. We try to address any worry or query addressed so when they do arrive there are no surprises”

Use of Materials

Three resources were of particular use to the Business School:

The Culture Shift Student Flyer was used to help the business school with the “nurturing processes” they have this year engaged in with partner colleges.

The Induction Invite Letter and the Induction Checklist both helped to structure a orientation session organized for all top up students at the University of Plymouth. The Checklist was distributed to all students who attended this session.

However the School did not find any need to customize any materials – their impact can be said to have been more indirect in that they raised the profile of these students and have contributed towards new ideas and initiatives:

“The materials made us think about our “hello pack” more and we looked at and adapted some of your materials to help us form the basis of that”.

When quizzed on the materials themselves, it was felt that they could be improved in the following ways:

- They could be streamlined better. It was hard to find what you were looking for when you needed it and the categories used were not helpful. It was also hard to pick up the key points of good practice.
- They were very repetitive.
- They could have had more materials which could be just picked up and used – so for example “something to give administrators” or “something to give students”. Although they understood that really they could adapt the existing materials the reality was that there was very little time to do this.
- They felt that a time scale approach might have been helpful but this was a leading question and I wasn’t convinced!

Customised resources available on SPAT CD and website:

- Hello pack
- Student ambassador leaflet
- Open day programme (to be supplied by Cathy)
- Total Top Up” induction programme (to be supplied by Cathy possibly via Nick Wiseman