

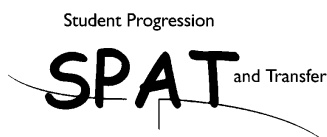
STEPS 2002 Conference

Supporting Transition by Effective Progression Strategies

Le Meridien Hotel, York
21st and 22nd November 2002

Timetable and Session Abstracts

This conference is subsidised by The Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning (Phase 3) Projects PROGRESS and SPAT.



STEPS 2002 Conference Timetable

Le Meridien Hotel (formerly The Royal York Hotel), York

21st November 2002

12:30 – 13:00 Arrival, registration outside The Wedgwood Room
(luggage may be deposited with porters, check-in to rooms after 2pm earliest)

13:00 – 14:00 Buffet lunch (adjacent to The Wedgwood Room). Special dietary needs food will be labelled.

14:00 – 14:40 Keynote presentation;
“Whose agenda is it? Key issues for Effective Student Progression”

Dr Jill Armstrong
LTSN Generic Centre, York
(The Wedgwood Room)

Between the wider government perspectives on widening participation to the lived experience of students entering Higher Education today lie a host of issues from the strategic to the personal. Whose agenda is it and how we find ways through the complexity of issues to help students develop their educational potential? The challenges are different from different personal standpoints but I will attempt to draw a framework for questioning and acting at different levels. This is not a prescription or a remedy but acknowledges the breadth of challenges and the need for collective action at all levels.

14:40 – 15:00 Questions and discussion

15:00 – 15:30 Coffee break

15:30 – 16:10 Keynote Presentation;

“Engineering solutions to retention problems”

Professor Jim Boyle
Department of Mechanical Engineering, University of Strathclyde
(The Wedgwood Room)

There is growing evidence that most students arrive at University ill prepared for the demanding undergraduate programmes of most higher education professional engineering courses. For some time, the Department of Mechanical Engineering in the University of Strathclyde has been fortunate enough to maintain a healthy intake of highly qualified students. Yet, up until a few

years ago almost a quarter had left by the end of the second year with a belief that either they had chosen the wrong course (and had failed at their first major decision as a young adult) or were academic failures (perhaps for the first time in their education). A study showed that many who remained were uncertain they had made the right career choice, a significant number at the end of their first year had still not engaged either with their fellow students or the academic staff. This presentation describes changes that were made to address this situation in order to make the transition from school to university a more positive experience, to give that critical 'sense of belonging' to the institution and degree program, while at the same time improving teaching and learning.

- 16:10 – 16:30 Questions and discussion
- 16:30 – 17:30 General discussion panel on transfer, retention, progression led by Dr Sue Pulko (PROGRESS Project Director) and Mr Mark Stone (SPAT Project Director)
- 19:00 – 20:00 Wine tasting hosted by Dr Edward Reed. Compare and contrast wines from a variety of countries and price brackets! (The Wedgwood Room)
- 20:00 – 21:30 Conference Dinner (Rose Room; smart casual dress, no jeans or trainers). Special dietary needs are catered for, please make serving staff aware.
- 21:30 – 23:00 Music provided by “*The Stubbs Brothers*” (The Wedgwood Room)

22nd November 2002

- 07:00 – 08:45 Breakfast, the Rose Room
- 09:00 – 09:45 Mr Frank Hamer
DCEE, University of Plymouth
“*Practical tools for supporting student transition to Higher Education*”
(The Oak Room)

Where is the line between teaching students how to suck eggs, giving helpful advice and information overload? Is there a danger that a ‘checklist culture’ and a casual adoption of organisational prescription may stifle the individual. We operate in an increasingly difficult arena, caught in a pincer movement between widening participation and limited funding. Any solutions we put forward to address the concomitant problems

carry associated risks, but can we afford not to try? At Plymouth, we have had significant numbers of students entering directly to Stage 2, and smaller numbers directly into final stage. Particularly if they are from overseas, these students invariably encounter both cultural and technical problems whilst making the transition to HE. We tried a simple solution, a CD was sent to direct entrants in the August prior to admission. This CD contained a range of pre-entry study material. Initial feedback shows that this was well received and it is envisaged that the Department will build on the initiative, but should we have a checklist for the checklists?

09:45 – 10:30

Mr Andrew Holmes
Centre for Lifelong Learning, University of Hull
“Understanding current qualification structures and progression routes”
(The Oak Room)

Documentation from HEFCE and the QAA is frequently perceived to be overly bureaucratic and functions merely to increase our administrative load. Why do we need a National Qualifications Framework - we all know what a degree is don't we! We do, don't we? Well, we may do, but employers and potential students may not. The National Qualifications Framework should provide a clear and transparent description of the different FE and HE qualifications from entry-level up to Doctoral level. Arguably this provides greater opportunity for student choice, increased flexibility, more 'stopping off points' and may facilitate widening participation to help achieve the 50% participation rate. This presentation will provide an overview of the National Qualifications Framework and the potential it may offer for widening participation.

10:30 – 11:00

Coffee Break (with software demonstrations available)

11:00 – 11:45

Mrs Lesley Greer
Teesside Business School, University of Teesside
“Transition Management”
(The Oak Room)

Retention of students is crucial to higher education institutions and is high on the governments' higher education agenda (HEFCE 2000). Universities UK (2001) stresses the importance of retaining students and ensuring their successful completion. There has been much research conducted into the reasons why students withdraw from their course and a variety of reasons for non completion. These include:

- *Lack of academic skills*
- *Difficulties in settling in and integrating into the life of the institution*

Induction is the “transition cushion” between past and future learning environment and is essential for students. An induction programme should be used to provide students with information about the institution in terms of academic expectations, student services and academic advising.

However, transition has been identified as a continuous process, so that information is provided to the student as the need arises, not just something that the institution does at the start of the academic year.

Teesside Business School has put together a programme of workshops to assist all students with the transition process. These are designed to provide students with timely information that is key to their studies. In the first year many of these focus on skills development and the support mechanisms that the University offers. In the second and third year these examine information that student require at this stage of their studies.

This presentation may be of interest to staff involved in retention strategies. An outline of the workshops will be presented with information about past success and how these will be improved for future cohorts.

11:45 – 12:30

Mr Steve Donohoe
 SLICE Project, University of Plymouth
“Integrating Students into the First Year of a University Course”
 (The Oak Room)

*There are many publications and other media and activities which deal with the integration of students into the first year of a University or College course. However, there are very few pieces of research which involve a snapshot of students’ feelings at the end of the very first day of their University experience. The **Student-centred Learning In Construction Education (SLICE)** team presented a workshop to students after their first day. The SLICE team would like to share the students concerns and invite discussion on how staff can prevent students’ concerns from becoming problems and affecting their own progress through a course. The presentation uses materials from the Building and Surveying courses from the School of Civil and Structural Engineering at the University of Plymouth, however it is at least arguable that the issues raised are applicable generally across courses.*

12:30 – 13:30 Lunch (Rose Room)

13:30 – 14:15 Dr Alison Halstead
Centre for Learning and Teaching, University of Wolverhampton
“An assessment of students thinking styles through psychometric testing and the benefits for student progression”
(The Oak Room)

This workshop initially introduces the idea behind the assessment of students' thinking styles and outlines the benefits that this approach has been shown to offer in terms of retention.

The session will go on to look at this newly-developed psychometric tool before reporting the outcomes of research carried out with over 200 engineering students who used the tool in the 2001/2 academic year. The focus of the feedback will be in terms of the progression statistics and future use. In addition a range of other instruments that have been used in engineering education will be discussed.

The second part of the workshop will look in greater detail at the instrument used in this study and open up the discussion to participants to reflect on its wider use in developing students self awareness and independence as learners.

To participate fully in this workshop you are invited to visit www.thinkingstyles.co.uk print off and complete the questionnaire, and forward it by Friday November 15th to:
Dr. Alison Halstead
Director of Learning and Teaching
CeLT. Harrison Learning Centre
University of Wolverhampton
Wulfruna Street
Wolverhampton
WV1 1SB

14:15 – 15:00 Mr Norrie Edward
School of Engineering, Robert Gordon University
“The use of Design as a motivational factor, early in Engineering undergraduate programmes”
(The Oak Room)

Engineering faculties throughout the United Kingdom have increasingly voiced concern over their ability to satisfy the

national demand for engineers educated to the level of professionalism required. Arguably the three main causes are the declining attraction of engineering courses, enrolled students' disenchantment with their courses and the ever increasing complexity of technological subjects. The first reduces intakes. The other two affect completion rates. Arguably the professional institutions have exacerbated the effects of the first two factors in their attempts to address the third. As most delegates will be aware, SARTOR regulations demand high standards of pre-entry qualifications. Further, they impose strict limitations on the numbers who can be granted advanced entry to courses. Nor is this a uniquely British problem. Speakers at a recent international conference reported a similar situation in most countries around the world. The PROGRESS Project was initiated firstly to investigate the causes of attrition and secondly to seek effective counter measures. Their survey of measures which engineering faculties had found effective was completed in 2001 and is available through the project co-ordinators. Among the strategies reported was the introduction of design projects in first year. This presentation reports on a follow-up survey to investigate some of these interventions in more depth and to assess their impact.

15:00 – 15:30

Coffee Break (with software demonstrations available)

15:30 – 16:15

Mr Walter Middleton
School of Computing, Engineering and Technology,
University of Sunderland
“Communication for Retention”
(The Oak Room)

Recently, the author has had the opportunity to work with staff in several universities to address issues connected with the effects of poor communications and poor levels of attendance on student retention and progression. To combat these problems in the School of Computing, Engineering and Technology at the University of Sunderland, an electronic tracking system has been designed and will be implemented in February 2003 across a range of modules delivered to first year engineering and computing students. The purpose of the system is to dramatically reduce the time elapsing between a student absence and contact being made to ascertain why. In this way it is hoped that meaningful support can be offered early to students who show themselves to be “at risk.” The paper reports briefly on the design of the system and outlines the results of a simulation run over the first semester of the academic year 2002-03. In addition, the paper outlines similar work done at Durham and the Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen. At these universities, the author found some very good examples of

effective practice which, it is hoped, will prove useful to colleagues across the sector.

16:15 – 17:00

Dr Bill Crowther
School of Engineering, University of Manchester
“Engaging engineering students using Problem Based Learning”
(The Oak Room)

Manchester School of Engineering adopted Problem Based Learning (PBL) as the primary teaching mechanism in years one and two of its new engineering undergraduate programmes launched in 2001-2002. Key drivers motivating change were the changing skills base of school leavers, the need for more ‘rounded’ graduates by industry, and the need to improve student retention rates. The main impact has been change from staff-centred passive learning in the old programme to student-centred active learning in the new programme. In practice this has meant that we now have more motivated students engaged in and actively guiding the learning process. It also has had an added positive effect on the way staff approach their teaching. This workshop will present details of how PBL was implemented, including design of problem statements, time-tabling issues and design of effective assessment strategies. An in-depth study was made of the first year of implementation and results from this will be used to illustrate strengths and weakness of the PBL approach.

17:00 – 17:45

Dr Jim Stevenson & Dr Tom Roper
EBS Trust & The University of Leeds
“Supporting and enhancing mathematics skills with the M⁴E DVD-ROM disk”
(The Oak Room)

M⁴E Maths for Engineers is being promoted as “the DVD-ROM for the way you work”. It recognises that institutions are mounting a range of strategies to provide support with maths; but not everyone has access to them. For a student to have a maths support centre, complete with personal tutor, in their pocket, loaded onto their computer, or on constant access in the library, should make a difference. That was one driver for developing M⁴E.

The other was the need in engineering departments to show the applications of maths a student could expect to encounter. So the disk presents video modelling, video tutorials, text and interactive exercises with web-link and history options.

It is now being delivered to all incoming students in engineering and physics at the Universities of Hull and Leeds and others have acquired site licences to make copies or distribute on-line. To evaluate what kind of difference it will make must be a longer-term exercise, but the PROGRESS project is making an immediate start.

This session will look at the disk, and how lecturers may best introduce it, or the elements of it which fit with their own strategies, to benefit their students.

17:45 – 18:00

Closing comments and discussion of way forward.