Managing the Transition from Further to Higher Education
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1. Introduction

- As documented above, there was an increased level of drop-out at level 4 compared to levels 5 and 6 in 2011-2012.
- Numerous factors influence student retention including: student attitude (Tinto, 1982), perceived satisfaction of faculty and classes (De Shields, Kara, & Kaynak, 2005), and social adjustment (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994).
- An increased knowledge of the transition period is pertinent given that students who have a positive FE experience are more likely to be retained and satisfied at HE (De Shields et al., 2005).
- A greater understanding of the transition from FE to HE would be useful given students have reported feeling unprepared and low in confidence (Byrne et al., 2012), with a view to work toward improving retention rates of first year undergraduates.

2. Objectives

- To examine multiple perceptions of the challenges and facilitative elements of the FE to HE transition.
- To provide evidence-based recommendations to improve level 4 student retention in the department of sport and exercise.

3. Method

- Following ethical approval, a qualitative approach was adopted with semi-structured interviews conducted with 3 participants (a FE lecturer, HE lecturer, and retained level 4 student).
- Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to elicit themes relevant to the research objectives.
- Transcripts and analysis were member-checked to ensure trustworthiness of the data.

4. Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Misconceptions of HE &amp; preparation</th>
<th>Independence</th>
<th>Enjoyment</th>
<th>Facilitators</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Academic environment and standard</td>
<td>Academic motivation</td>
<td>Facilitator to thrive</td>
<td>Pre-HE</td>
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<td>Living arrangements</td>
<td>Adaptation to teaching styles</td>
<td>Barrier to retain</td>
<td>During-HE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Direction</td>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>Correct path?</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Table 1: Categories and higher order themes in relation to the FE to HE transition

- Students aren’t prepared for the quality of work that is expected at university level, they don’t possess the required skills to write academically.
- I took each thing as it came and I dealt with it quite well... because I enjoyed my course that helped everything become much easier.
- There has to be an internal fire inside a student, a strong desire and ability to self-motivate themselves.
- Both sides of the bridge - FE needs to develop and measure study skills and HE need to measure their new recruits’ study skills and give options to develop.

5. Discussion

- Various factors, particularly being under-prepared (Byrne et al., 2012) influenced the challenging FE to HE transition.
- Multiple perspectives provided an understanding of the key role to be played by FE and HE in facilitating transition.
- Results support proposition of ubiquitous focus on literacy and study skills (Nandeshwar, Menzies, & Nelson, 2011).
- Many factors are controllable and thus an awareness of these should promote positive change.

6. Strategies for Improvement

- FE taster days at HE institutions that give authentic experience of work standard and case studies.
- Explicitly demonstrate the bigger picture to students at FE and HE (i.e., HE part of continuous development process).
- Bridging workshops at FE to develop and monitor study skills that are continued at HE with transparent feedback.
- At HE, students could immediately write a 500 word essay that is built on and progressed each week until module end.
- Consider that HE is unique - challenges await but developing the controllable aspects will increase the likelihood students are retained, enjoy their learning, and thrive in HE.

7. Limitations and Future Research

- Small scale study (3 participants, 1 HE and 1 FE institution).
- Future research may wish to incorporate a quantitative approach to strengthen the proposed recommendations. Indeed, implementing and assessing the effectiveness of the suggested strategies appears warranted.
- Further interviews would not only elicit more depth, but evidence links between categories/themes thereby providing knowledge of underlying mechanisms.

8. References