Preparing school leavers transitioning to online higher education: a case study

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Introduction and context
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Young Applicants in Schools

YASS Registration for 2021-22 is now open! Find out more about how to register students.
COVID-19: Latest information for students taking modules as part of YASS can be found here.

What is YASS?

Our Young Applicants in Schools Scheme (YASS) gives S6 students in Scotland the unique opportunity to study a range of university level courses in school alongside their other studies.

YASS is designed to bridge the gap between school and university, college or employment and helps motivated students stand out from the crowd. It encourages independent learning and builds confidence. Taking part in YASS develops key skills like time management and using an online study environment.

Registration for YASS modules is organised through the school, although students deal directly with The OU when it comes to their course work and assessment.

8,800 young people from almost 300 schools have taken Open University modules through YASS. Click here to meet some of our YASS students.

The map below shows the number of schools participating in YASS by Scottish Parliament region in 2019/20.
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Pathways

- Arts pathway
- Health and social care pathway
- Social sciences pathway
- Sport and exercise pathway
2 The research project
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Project questions

What are the key obstacles or challenges that students face on the module?

Do young students require different types of support from other students?

Does the module prepare YASS students for studying higher education?
Data

- 66% ALs – YASS students have different characteristics and behaviours
- ALs and students said YXM130 is good preparation
- Time management, writing skills, digital skills and navigating the VLE
- 57% of students no impact of COVID
- 1/5 thought that the pandemic had been beneficial to their OU study.
- Students - time management and working independently
- ALs - communicating with students as reluctant to use the ‘phone and preferred email (but with a slow response time).
- Lower engagement - 33% disagreed that students were engaged.
- The main method of contact was email, followed equally by phone and other
- 83% of ALs felt that students needed most support with understanding assessment tasks.
- Students looked to their AL for support and employed time management strategies to overcome these barriers.
Communication

I found that initially it was more difficult to develop a working relationship with the young students because they are used to being in a face-to-face situation with their teachers in school and weren't quite sure how to interact.
I found the lack of a teacher to occasionally present difficulty though this did force me to be more self-sufficient in my studies.

I was used to being guided through work and supported so it was quite a change to have to work independently initially when I started.

‘I have been able to learn how to balance my school work and my other commitments outside of school with my OU studies. I have done this by planning ahead and by allocating enough time to completing each task.'
‘In my experience of teaching this age group, students need clear and specific guidance - if anything is unclear or too complex a task they tend to give up, as their brains are wired differently and are still developing. Simplicity is really the key, as well as being offered structured tuition and support.

I think that maybe there could be some more specific support for younger students such as weekly or monthly emails in relation to their ou studies. I think that would be helpful to give them some additional support.

The OU could provide concise guides and instructions for assessment tasks.
So what?

Overcoming the barriers, changes to the module
‘The students completing will be better independent learners, have a good sense of feedback at HE and the tutor/student relationship, have a good sense of disciplines and different approaches, know a bit about reflection. I think it's a brilliant module once students are engaged.’
References

5. Ingram, R., Gallacher, J.: Making the Transition from College to University. , Glasgow (2013).
11. White

With thanks to Maria Aristeidou (IET)
Reflections

1. What assumptions do you make about your students and online learning?

2. Should you adapt your communication style for online teaching and, if so, how?

3. What future research could help us to develop a better understanding of young students making the transition to online HE?
THANK YOU
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