



Supporting BTEC Students' Success Symposium

Brunel University London

30th April 2018

 #BTECtransition

Supporting BTEC Students' Success Symposium

Welcome to Brunel

We are delighted to welcome such a huge variety of presenters and delegates to Brunel University London to explore the challenges students holding a BTEC qualification face when transitioning to Higher Education (HE) and how we may support them both pre- and post-entry. Over the past few years, the success of students with non-traditional entry qualifications at university has been at the forefront of research and interventions on transition.

This symposium comes out of Brunel's 'Transition Project' and aims to foster collaboration between HE and FE by bringing together colleagues to share approaches to transition support in response to the increasingly diverse student body entering HE. The Transition Project is in its third and final year at Brunel and as we look for direction as to where to take our work next, we wanted to explore what the varied work taking place across the sector.

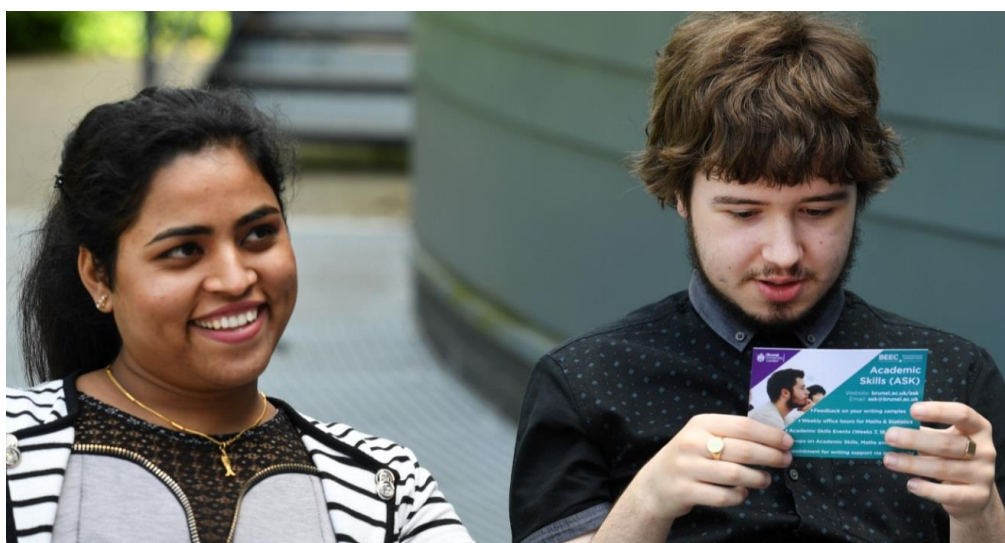
As Widening Participation moves focus from access to success, this symposium draws together practitioners from outreach and learning development, colleagues from colleges and NCOPs, as well as academics. We hope this will be a rich environment for you to share experiences and thoughts on student success and that you will leave with some clear ideas to take back to your own institutions.

Our Keynote

Newton Room

Hugh Joslin, University of Greenwich

Since 2011, Hugh has worked as a researcher at the University of Greenwich working with colleagues, Sharon Smith and Professor Jill Jameson. He has recently co-authored four research reports focused on progression to higher education of apprentices and college students focusing on both England and London. Between 2013 and 2016, Hugh also worked on an ESRC funded Seminar Series on Higher Vocational Education and Pedagogy led by the University of Greenwich. Hugh's previous experience includes five years as Director of the Kent and Medway Lifelong Learning Network; five years leading the Kent and Medway IAG and Nextstep Service and fourteen years in further education as Student Services Manager and Business Studies lecturer.



Our Research Roundtable

Newton Room

Taking place between 10.40 and 11.15, this is a series of short presentations from a selection of universities summarising their research on the BTEC student experience with the opportunity to discuss and compare findings by inviting questions from delegates.

Andre Koziello, Nottingham Trent University

Andre Koziello is a 1-1 specialist study skills tutor, Lecturer in Higher Education, and Educational Developer targeting inclusive curricula, pedagogy and assessment.

Please find some further information providing background to NTU's contribution to the Research Roundtable on page 9.

Alex Masardo, University of Gloucestershire

Dr Alex Masardo is Academic Subject Leader for Early Years and Education at the University of Gloucestershire. He is currently conducting research around parental engagement in comparative perspective. His recent work, published in *Educational Review* (Shields and Masardo, 2017), looks at differences in the post-16 qualifications market and outcomes in higher education. Alex is Associate Editor of *Journal of Family Studies*.

Katie Osmon, Brunel University London

Katie is the Transition Project Manager at Brunel University London. The project is in its third and final year and has focussed on FE/HE collaborative approaches to supporting BTEC student transition and eventual success with a focus on academic skills development. Her background is in Widening Participation.

Mark F Smith, University of Lincoln

Dr Mark F. Smith is both the Director of Education within the College of Social Science and Principal Lecturer within the School of Sport and Exercise Science, at the University of Lincoln. Having obtained his PhD in Sport Science at the University of Kent, he began teaching in Higher Education in 2001 and is a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. As an active researcher and practitioner, he is responsible for providing strategic leadership in the enhancement of student learning opportunities as well as supporting teaching innovation. Mark is currently leading an institutional project entitled *Building Bridges to Success* aimed at improving the experience and academic success of students who join the University through BTEC pathways.

Debbi Stanistreet, University of Liverpool

Debbi is a Senior Lecturer, and Director of Widening Participation for the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences at the University of Liverpool (UoL); and a member of the National Forum for Access and Continuing Education Executive. Debbi uses mixed methods in her research and the BTEC review she recently led at UoL, was informed by this approach.

Our Presentations

Breakout Sessions 11.25-11.55

Our breakout sessions are a mixture of lightning talks and presentations. The lightning talks are grouped by similar topics.

Newton Room

Successfully making the transition in to Higher Education and progressing through your degree

Alison Griffin, Natalie Hyde and Jonathan Nassar, University of West London

Combining the work of the Engagement Team with the Schools and Colleges and Outreach Teams, UWL provide a unique service to support students as they prepare for university in the summer and then make the transition in to Higher Education. This support continues as students face new challenges throughout their course. The support the Engagement Team offers includes Academic 1:1 Drop-in Support sessions, Academic Skills Workshops and Peer Mentoring opportunities.

Daily academic drop-ins require no prior appointment and students can discuss academic issues or concerns and find solutions on an individual basis. Workshops allow students to develop their academic skills. Peer Mentoring allows students to use their experience to support other students, working at a level below them.

This package of support, which starts months before the courses begin, eases new students into the academic environment of HE, whatever their previous experience, and ensures a smooth transition to study at university.

Pre-entry Transition to Brunel: Supporting BTEC students through HeadStart

Charlotte Thackeray, Brunel University London

HeadStart aims to support Widening Participation students with their transition to studying in higher education and is a week-long induction before 'Fresher's week'. This week provides students with the opportunity of meet other new students, get to know the campus, meet individuals from different services and gain an introduction to study skills they will need during their time at Brunel.

All new incoming foundation and level 1 BTEC students are invited to attend HeadStart. Throughout the week students recorded what they found most valuable, whether perceptions of HE were changing and reflections of the week overall.

Comparing A Level and BTEC students, initial results show that study skills are valuable to students regardless of educational background. Additionally, BTEC students tend to rate themselves higher and when it comes to support services the educational background of a student does not have as much of an impact as their personal circumstances.

Darwin Room

The University of Greenwich's NCOP Mentoring Scheme at MidKent College

Alison Ackroyd, MidKent College

BTEC Applied Science at MidKent College have been working with the University of Greenwich on a bespoke mentoring project since April 2017 as part of the NCOP to increase participation in HE. MidKent College is on the doorstep of the Medway Campus of the University of Greenwich so we have had a unique opportunity to develop a range of ideas with staff and student ambassadors on a regular basis. Our first year level 3 BTEC students are just about to begin this scheme and the project is set to undergo expansion at MidKent College this term.

A non-deficit approach to BTEC students in supporting transition into Higher Education: an evaluation of a peer mentoring programme

Rosalind Lord, St Mary's University

An evaluation of a transitional peer mentoring programme at St Mary's University which takes a non-deficit approach to BTEC students in supporting them to achieve their full potential. The opt-out peer mentoring model is set within the academic sphere, experienced as a normal part of the course, creating opportunities for the whole cohort to settle into university life and be supported in their studies. In the first semester of 2017 all first year students from two selected programmes were placed into mentee groups of five, each group mentored by one second or third year student from the same programme. Self-perception impact data demonstrates that the mentoring programme was valued by mentees for helping transition to university life and highlighting the importance of reading for academic success. Both mentees and mentors felt the mentoring programme enhanced their student experience. The practicalities and challenges of operating a peer mentoring programme are discussed.

Breakout Sessions 12.00-12.30

Newton Room

'BTEC Learners, we want you!' Schools, colleges and universities working together to support the progression of level 3 BTEC learners to higher level opportunities

Catherine Fenwick and Lucia Byrne, Aimhigher London South

'Getting the most from your BTEC' is a one-day conference for year 1 Level 3 BTEC students from schools and colleges across the Aimhigher London South network. Now in its 7th year this conference is a key component of the Aimhigher calendar of collaborative events. In this practical session attendees will:

- Learn about the developments of the conference and hear how it has been adapted to meet the changing requirements of the BTEC qualification and vocational learning;
- Hear what impact collaborative Aimhigher programmes have had on progression to university and attitudes to learning;
- Discover ways in which the conference has been embedded into the wider programme of support for BTEC learners in partner schools;
- Discuss the barriers to progression and how the partnership is developing further ways of working together to support these learners in their learning at a higher level

Darwin Room

Working with BTEC progressors: Providing academic support to HE students within an FE setting

Claire Lyness, Sunderland College

This talk will give an overview of the current HEFCE Catalyst-funded project at Sunderland College. Run jointly with Darlington College and New College Durham, the project aims to provide academic skills support to students studying on HE courses within an FE college in order to improve attainment and progression to Level 6 and 7. Although the project is not specifically aimed at BTEC students, the demographics of the North East, where 35% of white working class students attend university solely with BTEC qualifications (Petrie and Gicheva, 2018), mean that the project encounters many students progressing from BTEC courses, especially on the Higher National programmes. The talk will outline some of the issues concerning BTEC progressors and how these are addressed within the

project. It will also discuss some of the barriers to engagement with the academic skills support service from a HE within an FE perspective.

A collaborative approach to embedding academic literacy practices for BTEC students on a Sport Science programme

Pamela Thomas, London South Bank University

Supporting students with a BTEC vocational qualification in an HE establishment can come with many distinct challenges one of which is the students' academic literacy practices. In collaboration with the Course Director on the BSc (Hons) Sports and Exercise Science and BSc (Hons) Sports Coaching and Analysis we worked together to embed academic literacy practices into the curriculum. My talk will outline the approaches that were taken, discuss the challenges that were faced and the impact the interventions had in developing, supporting and retaining students in this discipline.

Lunch and Poster Presentations 12.30-13.10

Newton Room

We are pleased to welcome posters from colleagues on the following topics:

The role of BTEC courses and colleges in supporting progression to HE: Implications for practices in HE

Clare Gartland, University of Suffolk

Hartpury Headstart – a passport to progression

Linda Greening, University Centre Hartpury

Targeted versus integrated support for BTEC students: What are the issues?

Lavinia Mitton, University of Kent

Steps to Success: Research, Present, Reflect

Luke Parmenter and Sarah Johnson, Nottingham Trent University

Building Bridges to Success Project

Mark F Smith, University of Lincoln

Pre-entry Transition to Brunel: Supporting BTEC students

Charlotte Thackeray, Brunel University London

Presentation 13.10-13.40

Newton Room

Supporting BTEC students' success through FE and HE collaboration

Katie Osmon, Brunel University London, and Judith O'Neill, Uxbridge College

Working with staff and students from both institutions, Uxbridge College and Brunel University London have piloted a range of approaches to bridge the gap between BTECs and degrees to improve the outcomes of students. This session will cover initiatives such as 'Pathways to Brunel' focussing on the academic skills development, and 'Education Exchanges' between FE and HE colleagues exploring continuity and disparity in students' academic experiences.

Breakout Sessions 13.40-14.10

Newton Room

London South Bank University academics teach two BTEC units to NewVlc college students in the University's state of the art media studios

Louise Andronicou, London South Bank University, and Jamie Gillooly, NewVlc

This presentation will explore how the strong educational partnership between LSBU and NewVlc College, led to LSBU academic staff delivering two BTEC IT units to two cohorts of NewVlc College students, at LSBU, over two years. You will learn about:

- How the partnership developed
- The challenges which were faced
- The importance of maintaining the partnership

You will also learn about the university experience of the BTEC students and the impact this had on

- The development of the BTEC students
- The grades they obtained
- Their university progression.

Darwin Room

Aiding success in transition through holistic provision and targeted peer support

Joan Upson and Zoe Ollerenshaw, University of Sheffield

To ensure an effective transitional experience and supported learning environment for all students, the School of Law at TUOS launched a new curriculum in 2016 designed to support those with BTEC/non-standard qualifications, by supporting all. More recently we have added, a tailored, peer mentoring strand bringing established students together with those in transition, and staff, to share wisdom and decode their new environment, allowing students to build upon and share the transition of others.

It is recognised that BTEC or other 'non-standard' entry qualifications, are underrepresented within the University sector, and it is our belief that the curriculum changes providing support through design, combined with the personal peer and tutor support will enhance and accelerate the transition these students, supporting them to achieve their full potential.

Discussion 14.20-14.45

Newton Room

A facilitated session reflecting on the day so far and an opportunity for delegates to network.

Presentation 14.45-15.15

Newton Room

What works? A framework to enable replication of successful student engagement intervention activities

Christine Broughan and Caroline Wilson, Coventry University

Supporting student's success requires knowing exactly *what* it is that works; how to replicate, sustain and scale up the activity. Our project, DRIVER, financed by the HEFCE catalyst fund seeks to find ways to scale up activities to student students transition to university.

This work introduces a protocol for the clear documentation of interventions as part of the evaluation of a series of student engagement activities whose premise is that they are effective and scalable. Clear specification of activities is an aid to evaluate what features are effective and also for successful activities to be implemented in other settings with the expectation that they will be similarly successful. We use an adapted version of the Behavior Change Wheel model used in the health sector (Michie, Atkins & West, 2014).

Closing Plenary 15.15-15.30

Newton Room

Reflections on the day and a final opportunity to network and ask questions of the speakers.

Appendix – Research Roundtable

Nottingham Trent University – BTEC Transition Research

Context

Nottingham Trent University's student BTEC cohort has increased year on year and therefore addressing any potential mismatch between the academic preparedness of the BTEC entry cohort and course curricula is increasingly critical if we are to meet our 'Success for All' goal for inclusive provision.

Focus Group

We spoke to one group of first year undergraduate students studying at our Brackenhurst campus who had all previously studied a BTEC at our Brackenhurst campus.

Transition

The majority of students agree that their transition from BTEC to Higher Education has been relatively smooth. Students feel that studying a BTEC at Brackenhurst made them feel more prepared. One of the main reasons for this is because they were used to writing regular assignments. Some students also feel that the practicals they completed during the BTEC course prepared them well for their HE course.

However, some students do feel that they have faced some challenges since starting their degree.

Longer lectures and a larger workload are amongst the issues experienced by BTEC students, who feel that university requires them to complete more work in their own time.

Other students have also been challenged by the level of writing expected from them at university and feel that they did not receive sufficient practice with this when studying at BTEC level.

Students also report finding exams difficult because they did not have to do any throughout their BTEC course.

However, all students agree that they felt prepared for beginning their course at university.

Support

Students are generally happy with the support they receive from their tutors and lecturers. They say that tutors inform them well about the library support.

All students agree that they would like to receive more help with the suggested activities (exam support, critical analysis, referencing, time management, writing skills, academic regularities, additional 1-1 / group tutorial support).

The area where students require the most support is referencing, as this is one aspect of university that they find particularly challenging. Students want to be told how to improve their referencing and do it properly, rather than just being told that they're not doing it correctly.

Whilst academic skills support is available at NTU, none of the students in this study accessed additional support during their first semester.

Review

The location, feel and familiarity of the campus were students' main reasons for choosing to study at NTU after completing their BTEC at Brackenhurst. Students like the fact that Brackenhurst "*feels like home*" and they "*already know the facilities*".

Now that they have completed their first term at NTU, students would like the next two terms to involve more 'practice progress' to prepare them for placements and further support their studies.

All students agree that they would recommend the BTEC to HE route to others. Their reasons for this are because they feel that the smooth transition is beneficial and the BTEC courses prepare individuals for degree level study.

Students were also asked what advice they would give to current BTEC students on preparing for university. **Time management and writing practice** were the most common answers; students say that they would encourage others to try writing at a higher level before starting university.

Actions implemented since the focus group

- All Brackenhurst FE level 2 students to attend a series of workshops preparing for HE.
- Targeted exam workshops for all first year undergraduate students who came from a BTEC entry route.
- Revision and exam best practice training for HE academic members of staff.
- All first year students to attend GRIT transformational coaching programme in 2018/19 student induction.
- HE academic staff to begin to observe BTEC lessons to enhance understanding.