

Managing transition from A Level: individual activity

Collection: Course design

Resource: Designing an English degree programme

Approximate duration

One hour

Learning outcomes

After completing this activity you should have acquired or deepened your

1. insight into how institutional procedures and cultures impact for good or for ill on learning situations and aspirations;
2. confidence to propose and argue to colleagues for a new module, form of assessment or of teaching;
3. critical understanding of curriculum and its constituent parts especially in the first year of a degree;
4. confidence in your own ability to identify blockages to learning, such as the transition process from A Level to university;
5. understanding of how students learn in this subject;
6. insight into the challenges presented by the subject, its ways of thought, of writing, of arguing, of quoting, especially in comparison to school or college.

Introduction

'Transition' is now widely used as a shorthand for a bunch of issues to do with the process of moving from school or college to university. Even when students remain in their home communities (often with the same paid jobs and occupying the same social world), the shift into Higher Education involves significant social and intellectual

uprooting. After the fairly intensive experience of A Level and the sense that tutors know you well, moving into a scattered timetable of some 8–10 contact hours a week, and being expected to manage your own study is widely experienced as a shock. The changing forms of student engagement with education mean that we cannot any longer simply construct degree programmes based on what we believe students 'ought to know' – let alone on our own previous experience as students.

Clearly, we owe it our students not to leave them all at sea at this vulnerable moment. The object of these activities is to help you think more about the sorts of pressures that first-year students are under and to develop ways of connecting up their past experiences with the new world of the university.

New students are in a sense strangers in a foreign land, and as such should be hospitably welcomed. Extending an active welcome towards newcomers to the discipline need not imply what some people call 'spoon feeding': we need to hold on to a belief that responsibility for their own learning rests with students. But it does imply that we cannot afford to operate on a simply 'take it or leave it' – or 'sink or swim' – principle, and that a partnership in learning can best be negotiated at an early stage.

The activity

1. Look at some of the Subject Centre's extensive material on the transition from A Level to degree level. Resources include:
 - [*In at the Deep End? The First Year in Undergraduate English Literature* \(Report series No. 17\)](#)
 - [*As Simple as ABC? Issues of Transition for Students of English Language A Level* \(Report series No. 14\)](#)
 - [*Four Perspectives on Transition: English Literature from Sixth Form to University* \(Report Series No. 10\)](#)
2. Based on the material you have read, make a list of the ways in which students' experience of English studies at A level is likely to differ from their experience of it in your English department. (Key topics are likely to include writing experience, the curriculum, academic literacy, relationships with staff, volume of reading, and approach to written work)



3. How might you design the first year of a degree to help students with these issues? Use the following list of programme elements to structure your thoughts. Under each element, write down the ways in which it might be designed to help students in the first year with transition:

- Induction
- Topics for first-year modules
- Teaching styles and formats
- Assessment design and pacing
- Feedback methods
- Student work between contact sessions
- The personal tutor system
- Collaboration with other parts of the university and 'non-academic staff':
Counsellors, Librarians, Careers, IT people

Links & References

- Smith, Keverne 'School to University: an investigation into the experience of first year students of English at British universities'. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 3.1 81 – 93.
- Hodgson A. and Spours K., *Beyond A-levels: Curriculum 2000 and the Reform of 14 – 19 Qualifications* (2003)

Relationship to the Professional Standards Framework

- **Core Knowledge 2:** Appropriate methods for teaching and learning in the subject area and at the level of the academic programme
- **Professional Values 3:** Commitment to the development of learning communities
- **Professional Values 4:** Commitment to encouraging participation in higher education, acknowledging diversity and promoting equality of opportunity

More information about the Professional Standards Framework can be obtained from the summary factsheet in the *Subject & Pedagogy* collection in HumBox.

<http://humbox.ac.uk/2731/>



Resources in the Course design Collection

- Course design: introduction to the collection
- Designing an English degree programme: resource overview
 - Designing in employability: individual activity
 - Designing in employability: group activity
 - **Managing transition from A Level: individual activity (*you are here)**
 - A delicate balance: group activity
 - A delicate balance: individual activity
- Designing an innovative English Literature module: resource overview
 - Location, location, location: individual activity
 - Location, location, location: group activity
 - Questions, questions
 - Integrating research into a module: individual activity
 - Integrating research into a module: group activity
- Filling the gaps: resource overview
 - Filling the gaps between sessions: individual activity
 - Filling the gaps between sessions: group activity
- Adapting a module: resource overview
 - Adapting a Literature module: individual activity
 - Adapting a Literature module: group activity
 - Pacing it out: individual activity
 - Curriculum framing
- Mapping and applying desirable student attributes: resource overview
 - Imaginary modules: individual activity
 - Imaginary modules: group activity
- Designing a creative-critical module: resource overview
 - Thinking about modules: individual activity
 - Thinking about modules: group activity

