

Transitions in higher education: From research to supporting teaching practice

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Transitions in higher education have an enormous impact on student success both in the short term, as they study at university; and long term, as life-long learners. This paper, the research underpinning it and the resulting development of online modules, translate transitions pedagogy into the activity of the classroom via much needed professional development in learning and teaching. Drawing on contemporary transitions pedagogy, this presentation outlines an ongoing project investigating and supporting transitions at the University of Wollongong (UOW). The HEPPP funded transitions project began by reviewing current support structures, systems and activities of transitioning students in their first year of higher education. Given the diversity of approaches and interventions across the university, our focus narrowed to transitioning teaching practices and student perceptions within first year subjects, where a gap was recognised to find ways to better support teachers' knowledge and understanding of transition. The outcome of the project was the development of an online module designed to support teachers of students in their first year of university study. The module featured a framework for supporting students' transition through six critical points in the curriculum (Harden-Thew & Dean, 2015) and featured videos to highlight students' voices to further inform teacher activity. The module was initially developed for sessional teachers and fifty sessional teachers completed it. Since the design and implementation of the online module, several revisions have ensued. First, taking the feedback from the pilot participants, we learnt that teachers valued the module for its practical resources and ideas and opportunities for practice sharing. Second, as UOW undergoes a major curriculum transformation of its academic teaching course, the module that focussed only on first year subjects has been revised widening its scope to include the multiple transition points of students moving in, through, and out of higher education. This new whole-of-course transitions module has been developed in collaboration with staff from across the institution. The online module is accessible to all UOW staff, triggering reflection on practice. Feedback is currently being collected for future revision and refinement. Transitions in higher education impact both the activity of the student and also the graduate; it has repercussions for retention and must be a high priority for academic developers providing professional development for teaching staff in higher education institutions. This presentation explicates the importance of translating transitions pedagogy into classroom practice via well informed teaching staff.

Harden-Thew, K & Dean, BA (2015). Six First Year Firsts: A professional development framework supporting teachers of first year subjects. *Students Transitions Achievement retention & Success (STARS) conference*. Melbourne: Australia, July 1-4.