Title: **Understanding student engagement through the student journey in Higher Education**

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Abstract:

Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- Have gained greater insight into the nature and diversity of the student experience and journey through Higher education.
- Appreciate the key influences on student engagement
- Identify good practices and staff approaches which foster student engagement

Session Outline

We have been researching student engagement since before the concept was really used in the UK. Our conception of engagement has developed to encompass the perceptions, expectations and experience of being a student and the construction of being a student; engagement therefore is a prerequisite of constructivist learning (Bryson and Hand, 2007). We have been informed by such as Tinto (1993), Dubet (1994), Mann (2001) and Kuh (2008) and the schools literature (e.g. Fredricks et al).

Much of the research on student engagement is based on snapshots of students via surveys (e.g. Krause and Coates, 2008) and there is a dearth of qualititative, longitudinal studies (Trowler, 2010). We began such a study of twenty four students across a large UK university in 2007, following them through their three or four years of university. Not all of them made it to the end. These regular interviews have produced a rich picture of the student journey – for some it was a roller coaster ride, but it was transformative process for all.

We have seen at first hand the intellectual development the students make as their 'ways of knowing' evolve (Baxter Magolda, 1992) and how they get involved in various communities. The social and emotional dimensions are very salient and a powerful influence on student engagement (Bryson and Hardy, 2012). Indeed the extracurricular is possibly more important than the curricular in development of the student and 'graduateness'. But what we do as staff really matters and can influence this journey in constructive (and less so) ways.

We have been able to develop a much greater understanding of student engagement in both conceptual and practical ways. We shall present some of our individual student studies (and bring a few students with us too – not those from the study!) and share our reflections and conclusions.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

Presenting our research for 15-20 minutes in an informal style (no powerpoint!)
Five minutes on questions of clarification about the paper and study
Discussion with participants in groups (facilitated and informed by the students) – themes (of course participants will introduce their own themes too, indubitably)

- What can we do to enhance student engagement?
- How do we respond and cope with diversity of students' responses to our initiatives?
- How do we foster graduate attributes through our practice (and our ability to influence and develop the practice of colleagues)?

A plenary of key points emerging from discussion (last 5 minutes). We shall also share our collated notes with participants from these discussions after the conference by email.

References

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