Title: **Getting started: using technology to enhance student transition into university**

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Abstract:

Session Learning Outcomes

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

- Identify the benefits of transition support for students entering higher education
- Describe alternative technologies for providing pre-entry support
- Evaluate the effectiveness of early preparation for academic practices
- Review the value of the early development of 'research-mindedness' through pre-induction activities.

Session Outline

The transition to higher education poses challenges on many levels. It has been recognised for some time that failure to appreciate the challenges of higher education can signal early withdrawal. Evidence shows that proactive management of transition is a key factor in student retention and success (Yorke & Longden, 2008). In particular, students reported that lack of preparation for academic practice played a significant part in their decision to leave.

Several UK universities have designed schemes designed to improve preparation for the student experience using a range of different technologies. The University of Lincoln's Getting Started project chose to use the institutional VLE as the platform, to offer early exposure to the technology used for teaching and learning.

Getting Started includes access to generic resources about coming to university, as well as course-specific information. It also includes a suite of learning development materials called 'Snapshot'. This consists of bite-sized chunks or 'snapshots' of content introducing aspects of academic practice including reading and writing, critical thinking, reflective practice and time management. As the university adopts a policy of research-engaged teaching and learning through its Student as Producer initiative (University of Lincoln, 2011), so this area is being extended to include awareness of research and its role at the heart of academic practice.

This session will describe the implementation of Getting Started at the University of Lincoln and identify the key success factors. It will consider the practical issues involved in overcoming systemic technical barriers to VLE access prior to enrolment. More importantly, it will assess the value of the scheme for ensuring students are better prepared for the challenges that lie ahead.

Delegates will be invited to share their experiences and relate issues to their own institutional and disciplinary contexts.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

1.	Initial presentation	15 minutes

2. Delegates divide into small groups to consider the issues involved in   15 minutes
    using technology to provide transition support in their own discipline
    or institution.
    Questions:
    To VLE or not to VLE? What are the advantages and disadvantages
    of using an institutional online learning environment compared to
    Facebook or another freely available social media site?
    From your own experience, identify some of the key areas students
    find challenging in the first semester.
    How might support for these areas be presented to students prior to
    enrolment week; for example recommended book(s), online websites,
    self diagnostic tests, activities, discussion forums, user-friendly bespoke
    materials, contact with an existing student – what might be the
    advantages and disadvantages of different support mechanisms?

3. Group feedback and plenary discussion   15 minutes

References

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