

Title: **Get Set for Success: a Widening Participation focused pre-entry programme for transition into Higher Education**

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Session Learning Outcomes

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

- Identify the elements and goals of a successful pre-entry programme for WP entrants
- Identify whether a programme like GSfS can benefit students' confidence levels with regards to transition into HE
- Identify issues that arise when organising a programme like GSfS and consider possible solutions

Session Outline

Students from under-represented groups are at risk of failing to achieve and engage at university (HEFCE, 2014). In accordance with a main priority of HE institutions (Thomas, 2012), the aim of GSfS is to improve student retention and success through the enhancement of transition into HE. GSfS introduces students to university life and study, by offering information sessions about the academic expectations of university and where to go for additional support. Participants get the opportunity to meet current students (who work as 'student ambassadors'), take part in activities and challenges, and experience living on campus for a night. The aim is for students to get a 'head start' and feel academically and socially prepared for university. The programme not only focuses on students' expectations, but also on increasing their confidence, which is identified as the main non-cognitive predictor of achievement (Stankov, Morony & Lee, 2014). GSfS has been successful in meeting its aims. The design of the programme meets the criteria for effective pre-entry interventions (Thomas, 2012): it is informative, manages students' expectations of university, focuses on academic skills, promotes links with peers, current students and staff and nurtures a sense of belonging. The programme has been organised for five years now and thorough evaluations demonstrated that participants' confidence levels increased in all investigated areas and that the sessions were valued. More than a year after the programme, students still recall GSfS as a great experience. However, there are drawbacks: students who need a programme like this the most may not accept the invitation (Durkin & Main, 2002) and it has become clear that GSfS might not be ideal for certain (groups of) WP students. A few students who suffered from anxiety

have dropped out of the programme at an early stage as they felt that GSfS could not alleviate their worries about entering university.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

The background for designing GSfS will be discussed (WP, target groups, goals), followed by an outline of the invitation process and programme content. Attendants of the session will get a visual guide through the material that has been designed (eg. Postal invitation, programme booklet, Facebook group) (*10 minutes*).

- Before moving on to the outcomes (effectiveness) of the programme, attendants will be asked to brainstorm/action plan how they would reflect on the invitation process (is it fair to only invite WP students?) and whether they can identify room for improvement. The main issue/question is: how can we (more) effectively reach students who may need a programme like GSfS the most? (*10 minutes incl. discussion*)

After a short discussion of ideas, we move on to the measured outcomes of the programme: ratings of confidence and programme elements. Confidence on different aspects of starting university was measured before and after the programme via questionnaires. Students were asked to indicate their feeling of confidence by answering 15 questions on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being 'not at all confident' and 5 being 'very confident'. Average scores before and after the programme were analysed with SPSS to identify whether there is a significant difference between feelings of confidence at the different moments in time. In addition to rating their confidence, students were asked to rate their opinion about the different elements/sessions of the programme in the after-programme questionnaire, on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being 'not at all worthwhile' and 5 being 'really worthwhile'. Finally, some anecdotal feedback a year after the programme will be briefly outlined. Although feedback has generally been very positive, a few students dropped out early in the programme and mentioned that they found the experience overwhelming (short explanation) (*10 minutes*).

- Attendants are asked to reflect on the programme from a 'disability adviser viewpoint': How can a programme like GSfS possibly be improved so that it caters to the needs of students with certain disabilities, like anxiety and autism? (*10 min incl. discussion*)

After a short discussion of the given ideas, the session will be summarised and action points for the future will be outlined (*5 minutes*).

References

Durkin, K. and Main, A. (2002). Discipline-based study skills support for first-year undergraduate students. *Active learning in higher education*, 3 (1), 24-39.

Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) (2014). Higher education in England 2014: Analysis of latest shifts and trends [Online]. Available at: http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/hefce/content/HEinEngland/2014report/HEinEngland_2014.pdf (Accessed: 28 October 2017).

Stankov, L., Morony, S. and Lee, Y.P. (2014). Confidence: the best non-cognitive predictor of academic achievement? *Educational Psychology*, 34 (1), 9-28.

Thomas, L. (2012). What works? Facilitating an effective transition into higher education. [*Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*](#), 14 (1), 4-24.