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Identifying, monitoring and addressing the needs of art and design students at risk of underachievement in their incoming year of study.

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Background and rationale

Art and Design has always attracted some of the most creative but most diverse and so-called non-traditional learners. Widening participation has further extended opportunity for people who previously might not have had access to Higher Education. Over recent years the School of Art and Design (SAD) has become aware of more students who experience difficulties with visual and conceptual skills, who have less general contextual awareness, and lower levels of academic writing skills. An increase in the number who display motivational and engagement problems resulting in poor or erratic attendance has also been noted.

With the large increase in student numbers, more diverse student profiles, and evidence of more students failing or withdrawing from study, particularly in their first year, it was necessary to strengthen and monitor academic support arrangements in order to address student needs at the earliest opportunity. Previous informal tutorial arrangements (prior to 2000) and recent increasing disparity in subject size within the School was potentially resulting in inequality of student experience and support.

The project embeds and builds upon previous university learning and teaching funded initiatives, the ILP (Individual Learning Profile, 2000/1) and the PAT (Personal Academic Tutor framework, 2001/2) with the continued aim of true equality of opportunity for study for all students.

The innovation

‘Institutions can do relatively little about students’ choice of programme and the way in which they are funded. They can, however, do quite a lot about the quality of the student experience in the critically important first year.’

(Yorke, 2002)

A more structured ‘whole student’ approach to improving academic guidance and the new student experience commenced with the establishment of the SAD School Quality Committee Sub-Group. The committee comprises representatives from Admissions, Registry, Student Programmes and Study Support, with a remit of amalgamating expertise and facilitating more rapid communication between the (previously ‘independent’) essential SAD generic strands of student contact. Whilst it is assumed that all aspects of the student experience are subject to continuous evaluation, the group identified 3 key areas for focussing improvement; Induction, Personal Academic Tutoring (PAT) and the monitoring of student cohorts with reference to achievement and retention.

1) Induction:

The existing organisation and content of Induction week was redesigned in order to place greater emphasis upon more actively welcoming and orientating new students into their chosen art and design subjects, rather than the 'University' and the 'School' systems and regulations. Throughout, the aim was to identify 'faces' of real and approachable individuals, rather than the more impersonal 'systems' of reference.

- Day 1, week 0, 10.00am – all new students directed to their subject (for joints, first named subject) where discipline specific induction began, ILPs completed, and PAT framework introduced
- School Induction (pm. Day 1) emphasised the nature of HE study, highlighting available academic and pastoral guidance and support. Individual inputs were made by representatives from SAD study Support, SAD Programmes, the Harrison Learning Centre, the Gateway (Finance, Careers, Jobshop, Student Enabling Centre, Counselling and Guidance) and the Students' Union. Improved Welcome Packs (initiated 2001) of relevant leaflets for advice and guidance were distributed
- ILPs were completed on Day 1, coded by Study Support and returned within 24hrs to subject tutors for reference with PAT forms
- Letters sent during week 1 offering appointments to students requesting additional help (ILP section 9)
- All students introduced to subject based PAT tutor and forms completed (PAT stage 1, Days 2-4, week 0)
- Students enrolled by subject cohort (Day 3, week 0)
- Subject specific activities (throughout week 0)

2) The PAT framework:

The existing framework was evaluated and improved following recommendations from Study Support, and PAT subject tutors:

- The PAT form was redesigned to streamline and ease completion for both student and tutor.
- Time allowed for each tutorial was extended from 15 to 20 minutes to allow for a more in-depth conversation.
- The number of tutorials was reduced to 3, with the 4th for only those students who needed or requested it.
- Week 8 (PAT 2) was indicated as 'non-teaching' for L1 in order for large subject groups to complete the tutorials. Programmes were adjusted where necessary
- Subject PAT tutors were briefed to ensure 100% compliance and a more consistent level of referral
- PAT tutors were required to possess detailed subject knowledge wherever possible
- PAT tutors were provided with colour coded overview information sheet in preparation for PAT 3 tutorials, with all 'already failing' or 'cause for concern' students highlighted in red
- PAT 4 tutorials were formalised to comprise Retrieval Plans, in an attempt to address 'already failing' or 'potentially failing' situations
- PAT tutors and the study support team fed back their views on the tutorial framework at the end of semester 2, with a view to future improvements and staff development.

- SAD Study Support files logged time spent with individual students and the nature of support required
 - ‘already’ and ‘potentially’ failing students were advised of the new SAD summer programme consisting of 2 (15 credit) generic Art and Design modules validated for standard and intensive delivery mode, and 1:1 tutorial support by appointment
- 3) Student monitoring:
- The existing (and ever expanding) information gathered required a more suitable database which would enable correlation and input from the new University SITS system. A greatly improved tracking system was developed which incorporates the following sections, each of which may be referenced independently or in combination :
 Name/subject(s)/mode of study/status
 ILP indicator code/EFL,E2L/assistance requested
 PAT stages 1-4/referrals/utilisation of study support/attendance concerns
 Results semesters 1 & 2/mitigating circumstances/end of year status
 - The SQC Sub-Group presented work to date to the SAD Learning and Teaching Committee (19.3.03). Discussion and feedback followed
 - An anonymous small sample of 10 students (Fig. 1) which included an intended section ‘additional prior qualifications and experience’, was discussed at SAD L&T Committee (19.3.03).

Student	Risk Coding	Disability etc	English as Foreign Lang	Assistance Requested	PAT 1 Completed	Referral Action	Referred to PS	Study Support File	Total SS Hours	PAT 2 Completed	Referral Action	Attendance Concern	Gender	Age	Ethnic Origin	Domicile	Student Loan	Accommodation	Entry Qualifications	HE Course Taken	Educational	Route	Results
1	R	B			Y	Y	Y	Y	15	Y	Y	N	F	39	21	Wton	Y	Rented	Adult Ed	N		B	B13 B11 C9 C8
2	G				Y	N	N	N		Y	N	N	F	20	11	Wton	N	PR	Foundation	N	A Level	B	C8 C9 C8 D6
3	Y				Y	N	N	N		Y	N	N	F	20	11	S'bridge	N	PR	BTEC	N	GCSE	B	F1 D7 C9 C9
4	Y	B			Y	N	N	N		Y	N	N	F	20	31	Wton	Y	PR	Foundation	N	GCSE	B	C9 B11 D7 D7
5	R		O		Y	Y	Y	N		Y	Y	N	F	46	31	Wton	Y	Other	BTEC	N		C*	C10 B12 B12 B11
6	R	B	O		Y	Y	Y	Y	4.5	Y	Y	N	F	20	31	Northants	N	Other	A/S	N		B	C10 E4 C10 C9
7	Y	B			Y	Y	Y	N		Y	N	N	F	22	31	B'ham	N	PR	HNC	N	GCSE	B	B11 ? ? ?
8	G				Y	N	N	N		Y	N	N	F	19	11	W York	N	Halls	AS Level	N	GCSE	A	E4 C9 B12 B11
9	G				Y	N	N	N		Y	N	N	F	22	11	Dudley	Y	Rented	AS Level	N		A	B13 B13 B13 A14
10	Y				Y	N	N	N		Y	N	N	M	20	11	Wednes	N	PR	Foundation	N	GNVQ/A	B	C10 A15 A14 B11

11	White British
21	Black Carrib

PR	Parental Home
*C	Clearing offer

Figure 1. Sample student profile

**Unfortunately SITs was unavailable to the project team at this time and therefore data could not be included across the whole year.*

- Additional basic skills workshops were offered outside and within module delivery times, student attendance monitored
- Module tutors were requested to keep attendance registers

Outcomes

The SQC Sub-Group is now included in SAD's regular committee meetings calendar. It reports to SQC and L&T committee, and also provides essential information for SAD senior management in reference to student experience and retention.

Outcomes in respect of the three key areas of focus were as follows:

- 1) The Induction experience:
 - Induction Week became an essentially subject based responsibility, with the generic School Induction and enrolment placed within a week of subject based activities, including administrative, academic and pastoral. The feedback received from subject leaders indicated that support for the change to a subject orientated induction week was unanimous. Whilst still far from perfect, the complex induction process involving so many disciplines (21 subjects) was greatly improved. Comments such as 'we acknowledge that this is a major logistical exercise and for the most part thanks to staff preparation it ran reasonably well' (JL, 7.10.02) and 'noticeably fewer students looking lost and confused' (DF, 4.10.02). Negative feedback primarily centred upon unsuitable available rooming (such as the demountable building which gave new students a very poor first impression of facilities), level 2 & 3 new entrants and late arrivals.
- 2) The PAT framework:
 - The ILP and the refined PAT framework continued to provide a minimum benchmark for a support system, available to all students, with almost 100% participation by subjects. It also continued to emphasise the need to view the individual as a 'whole' person in relation to all 'factors affecting study'.
 - As PAT tutors were more familiar with the system in its second year of operation, comments on return lists were more specific in content and referral to support systems was more direct.
 - The ILP continues to provide a useful first stage indicator for cross reference within the PAT system, immediately raising awareness of lack of confidence in basic skills though student self diagnosis.
 - The PAT framework provided an opportunity for tutors and students to discuss their whole programme, including the newly instigated pathways/electives and check for suitability. It also continued to provide an opportunity for tutors to convey an interested and caring approach, glean valuable non-verbal information, and to direct students to seek help both within the School and the University. It offered opportunities to discuss results, celebrate achievements, identify specific causes for concern, re-sit counseling and to explore potential progression difficulties. Above all it emphasised that academic guidance and support is an integrated 'normal' activity within their art and design education.
- 3) Student monitoring:
 - The improved and much enlarged database enables information to be extracted by subject cohort or individual, in relation to all the identified sections, providing an essential overview of student progression and achievement of level 1 students
 - The extensive data required manual input due to delays in the implementation of the Strategic Information Technology Services Ltd (SITS) system
 - Referrals to SAD study support were logged on the database, and it was possible to check if students had followed advice (Fig 2).
 - The number of L1 students utilising SAD study support continued to rise, of which a significant number had been coded 'high' and 'medium high' risk.

Figure 2. Confidential Personal Academic Tutorial Record/Referral Sheet – PAT One (Week 0, Semester 1)

Personal Academic Tutor: xxx

Subject: xxxxxx

Date: 14-10-2002

	Student Name	Tutorial Completed (please delete)	Referral Action Recommended	Referred to Pam Salter
1	xx	YES	Treated for Depression in the past. No need to take action at present, but keep a watch	NO
2	xx	YES	Hasn't studied art as a subject in previous education. May require additional support in basic drawing skills	YES
3	xx	YES	Slight concern, but will monitor and advise student to seek out PS if needed at next PAT	NO
4	xx	YES	Italian student. Has recognised a symptom of dyslexia in her own language. Hasn't been assessed	YES
5	xx	YES	NONE REQUIRED	NO
6	xx	YES	NONE REQUIRED	NO
7	xx	YES	First language is Iranian. Struggling with understanding and responding due to the language barrier. Taking a module each semester in English language but would appreciate additional support	YES
8	xx	YES	NONE REQUIRED	NO
9	xx	YES	NONE REQUIRED	NO
10	xx	YES	NONE REQUIRED	NO
11	xx	YES	NONE REQUIRED	NO
12	xx	YES	Registered as dyslexic 2 years ago, is unsure of her present status and has requested additional support and possibly further tests to establish the extent of her dyslexia	YES
13	xx	YES	Requested additional support with written work	YES
14	xx	YES	NONE REQUIRED	NO

15	xx	YES	Student has recognised that she may be dyslexic. Began process of assessment during her access course, but incomplete and needs further assessment.	YES
16	xx	YES	NONE REQUIRED	NO
17	xx	YES	NONE REQUIRED	NO
18	xx	YES	NONE REQUIRED	NO
19	xx	YES	Cares for a parent with severe MS. Quite shy and may lack confidence. PD will monitor situation but student may need additional support in future	NO
20	xx	YES	NONE REQUIRED	NO
21	xx	YES	NONE REQUIRED	NO
22	xx	YES	NONE REQUIRED	NO

SAD study support monitoring, Level 1:	High risk	27
	Medium risk	20
	Low risk	4
	No code	4
	Total	55

- Subject leaders and PAT tutors were provided with colour coded cohort information sheets, where students at risk of failure or cause for concern were identified in red
- Students attending the summer programme were identified and progression status monitored (report on student progression in progress)
- Delays in the implementation of the SITs system resulted in areas remaining to be investigated such as previous academic qualifications and experience (example figure 3 was compiled by individual correlation with student PAT forms in subject held files)
- Research into 'links with attendance' was incomplete, requiring more administrative hours than were available (electronic monitoring of attendance is currently unavailable in SAD)
- 'The student and staff experience' in relation to The Future of Higher Education (HMSO 2003) was identified as a focal point for the SAD staff conference (4/5.9.03)

Benefits

Building upon previous university learning and teaching projects in 2001/2 and 2002/3, this project has continued to support the school in refining and monitoring its academic counselling framework and embedding the school's Learning Support philosophy into its creative and academic culture. It has enabled the School to understand and control better when, and how best to support students. It has created the potential to provide clear overview 'pictures' of information in addition to individual 'snapshots' of student achievement.

Learning support and effective referral is now becoming a 'normal' activity within the School, and regular utilisation of assistance continues to increase at all levels. Gradually the tutor / student relationship has been more individually and personally redefined, and early diagnosis of study and time management difficulties has been achieved.

The project continues to inform the need for improvements in the curriculum, delivery, resources, staff development and future planning. We take heed from the warning,

'But we must make sure that institutions are not exploiting their most vulnerable students by making up the numbers with students who cannot cope; and we must also make sure that institutions support those who do have the potential for higher education, but need the extra help to realise it.'

(The Future of Higher Education, 2003, 6.28)

Evaluation

Despite initial concerns about additional workload and insufficient resources, School support for the initiative has now become firmly established. The SQC sub group reports to the School's Quality and Learning and Teaching committees which provide a formal opportunity for discussion and feedback. Further discussion opportunities arose at tutor briefing sessions, staff development sessions and the School Conference (September 2002). Additionally, ongoing feedback from PAT tutors and students continues to provide essential further informal comment. Throughout, support has been unanimous.

The project group have been asked to present their work to SAD Senior Management, University of Wolverhampton Directorate, university representatives from the West

Midlands Higher Education Association, Goldsmiths University, visiting international university representatives and the Centre for Learning and Teaching.

As previously reported (Salter, 2002) difficulties in collecting and collating accurate data remain major concern, and an extremely time consuming activity. The group are conscious of the ever expanding areas of data worthy of investigation. However, resources continue to restrict activities.

If we are to offer our students the very best opportunity to achieve their potential then we must surely do our utmost to inform our provision and decision making for future initiatives. This project, as those of the two previous years, has merely begun to enlarge our understanding of the complexity of the consequences of widening participation.

‘The process of recruitment is well understood in terms of its obvious and immediate impact on the institution and the cycle of activity which underpins it. In contrast, the activity required to keep students on course is less well understood, extends over a much longer time period and the measurement of success is complex.

Despite the difficulties, universities are increasingly aware that recruitment and retention are two sides of the same coin and that both contribute to the financial health of the institution. Universities are also increasingly aware that they have a responsibility to ensure that every student accepted has an equal opportunity to succeed and that they have a central role in establishing a level playing field.’

(Johnston, 2002)

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