Chapter 6

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Mind the gap: supporting students to have a successful transition to university, it is everyone's responsibility.

> Today I'm gonna talk a bit about the jump from school to university. I call it a jump because that's exactly how it feels. Like a leap. With your eyes shut. Off a cliff. At night. Into shark infested waters. At least that's how it felt for me, the first time. (Second year student)

6.1 Introduction

Transitions can be difficult and a time when we lose our sense of place (Todres t al. 2009). It could be a: Change in physical environments and much more. A sudden loss in an individual's sense of belonging, security, or continuity, especially to those away from home for the first time and having to manage life skills they may not have done before. A time when students feel like strangers seeking to find a sense of place "in an unknown culture where norms and routines are alien" (Todres et al. 2009, p. 73).

This dislocation doesn't only have to come from a change in the physical environment, but at times from everything that we know and understand as familiar. This is the case for thousands of students who arrive every year to a university unfamiliar to them, perhaps in a different city, a different country or even a different continent. This represents a complete change from what is familiar to them. While some students may thrive during this time, others, unable to cope during such major shift, can become isolated, lose their sense of self in order to fit in, or feel as one student put it: 'erased, unseen and incapable.'

Of course, there is no one student transition experience – mature students returning to study after pursuing a career or raising a family will face different challenges to those who may progress directly from school to university with a cohort their own age and with similar recent life experiences. Students who live at home may not face the challenge of relocating to unfamiliar surroundings, however their opportunity for building relationships in the same way that those thrown together into a new living experience will be different. There are also those whose commitment mean that university is just a peripheral part of their life, rather than its core purpose – student carers, parents, those studying part-time or distance learning. Additionally, students from different ethnic, religious or socio-economic backgrounds who may be unfamiliar with the norms of other groups.

In this chapter, we share our journey to develop an online platform to support students on their transition to university. After providing an overview of the state of play and the role of student services during this transition and beyond we go on to divide the chapter into two main parts. In the first part, present the findings from a small study exploring this transition from the point of view of current students and staff in a UK institution. We then introduce the case study of our online tool and its first evaluation based on a large survey carried out to gauge its efficacy. In the second part of the chapter, we present findings from a survey to staff (academic, professional and support) exploring their views

regarding the induction process and the expectations to and from students. The rationale for this is to gain a holistic view of this important transition and how to improve it and make it meaningful to the students coming to our university.

6.2 Background

The transition to university is challenging, and to an extent, it can even be traumatic if not managed properly. There are many areas where students will be doing things new to them such as developing social groups, learning new academic skills and for some, learning to cook for themselves for the first time (Perry et al. 2001). According to Tinto (2004), students withdraw due to a lack of academic, study skills as well as financial pressures and issues around social integration such as isolation.

Over the past three years, we have seen an increase in students arriving at university with complex barriers to learning. This is something that is a growing challenge within the sector (HEA 2017) and particularly important within the first year, as students arrive at university with a set of expectations that may be quite different to the reality.

Some students arrive without an understanding of the specific requirements regarding academic writing, marking criterion or referencing, for example. This, on top of having to get acquainted in most cases with a new city, a new set of friends and, for some, living for the first time away from home. This combination of the new and unknown can exacerbate their barriers and block their ability to learn effectively and even harm their wellbeing.

Schools and colleges should continue working on preparing students for the practicalities of going to a university such as finances, time management, budgeting and other areas which can affect students' wellbeing (Seldon and Martin 2018). However, there seems to be a lack of understanding of the expectations that universities have of first-year students and this, according to van Rooij (2018), keeps teachers from paying more attention to university preparation.

A survey carried out by HEPI, and the HEA (Seldon and Martin 2018, p. 10) found that students are "doing less well than 20 to 24- year olds from the general population on four measures – life satisfaction; whether life feels worthwhile; happiness; and anxiety." Consequently, considering these areas is an important aspect of supporting students through this transition. This is not to say that Universities are fully responsible for the mental health and wellbeing of students; in fact, the whole community should evaluate how young people are supported if at all. This includes parents, schools and the government as there has been a clear deficit in funding for mental health and wellbeing programmes that can support young people.

6.3 The role of student services in supporting students during their transitions

Many schools and colleges focus on preparing their students for the academic aspects of university – for example, how to write a good personal statement, encouraging attendance at open days, school visits to universities. However, it is often the pastoral and personal issues that cause the most difficulty for students in adapting to a new way of life. The structure of Student Services varies widely across the HE

sector. However, virtually all settings will have as a minimum a focus on students' welfare and wellbeing through the provision of mental health and counselling support and disability/SpLD (specific learning difficulties) support (AMOSSHE 2020).

Many students will have received significant and ongoing support for these needs throughout their school life, and both schools and students may assume that this support will automatically continue into their HE experience. This is not the case, funding streams are different and will need to be applied for; those with the severest mental health problems will now be supported by the Community Mental Health Teams (CMHT) instead of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), and the more general support that universities offer is designed to help students to develop coping strategies that will stand them in good stead for the rest of their life beyond university. This different way of engaging with support can be challenging, and it is essential that students approach their Student Services as early as possible to explore the available support, and to get funding in place before the start of the course, if possible. For this reason, we revised our pre-arrivals material to make students aware of the importance of this as part of the transitions phase, something we discuss later in this chapter.

Mental health support, in particular, has come to the fore in recent years with media reports of their being a 'crisis' amongst students and high rates of suicide in this population. These reports are normally as a result of whichever is the latest survey. However, as the research methodology differs, it is difficult to understand whether there is a genuinely higher risk to this group than young people generally. In fact, according to the Office for National Statistics (Caul 2018), the suicide rate for HE students is lower than the non-student population of a similar age. What is true is that there has been an increase in students self-reporting issues of mental illness, with anxiety, the most commonly reported reason for seeking help.

6.4 Part one
6.4.1 The student voice
Since the voice of the student is the most important to understand this area fully, the experiences of nine undergraduate students were explored through a symposium in the summer of 2018.The transition from school to university can impact every aspect of someone's experience. It does not only involve the physical and tangible changes, but there is also an inner transformation of students' identity and their sense of self. As this is a time of great change, and in a sense, a rupture to what has been and can, therefore, feel dehumanised, it is the role of those working in HE to account for students' wellbeing holistically during this period and indeed through each of their transitions.

In order to capture these qualitative transitions, which unless documented may be difficult to witness, we were keen to hear the voices of some students whose journey could benefit our understanding of their experience and perhaps that of others.

During the symposium various activities took place. Students presented their views in various formats and answered questions posed by members of staff. Following this, participants were divided into small groups to reflect on the perfect host during the induction process. Here various common ideas were

identified. The last part of the symposium consisted of a plenary where all those present discussed meaningful findings and recommendations to improve practice. Some of their comments and main findings are presented in the following section.

6.4.2 Students views
Those students who took part in the symposium provided rich information full of insights regarding their experience.

"**If I were to change the induction, I would make it more personal** and more target based…I think I would have benefitted from a personalised university experience sheet, asking what I wanted to achieve when I left university…University is as much as life lesson as it is an educational one. You learn that when it draws to a close" (UK student L5)

"I found the induction quite overwhelming, and **I think the day could have benefited from a variety of students (from all years) presenting a lecture on 'the life of a student**" (L6 student) "When I came here, the first month was a bit weird for me because **I had days when I was happy and excited to study and live abroad, and then having days where I was feeling disoriented and alone**." (L6 student)
"Maybe it would be nice to have a chat with a uni psychologist when you are having a strange moment like this. I really appreciated the events that the university organised for us, parties and game nights included. I think it is a brilliant way to break the ice and meet new friends. Getting used to a new culture can be challenging sometimes. The fact that the uni staff is patient and very kind to explain (and re-explain) information makes me feel at ease. **I think that this sort of personal support that the university offers is great and maybe even more important than the academic support**. I enjoyed this experience as much as I could, and I'm glad I got help when I need it" (L4 international student)

Other students mentioned that the gap from school to university was a "jump", but that smaller classes made things easier. The amount of support at their university was highlighted by all the students who participated. A second-year UK student added that

- There should be better signposting for the support available
- Fresher's week and induction week should not be at the same time
- Perhaps having a PAL (peer-assisted learning) or peer to support them during the first weeks

However, one student stated: "There were too many students in need of support (which speaks volumes in itself), and I was told I would have to wait months for support." This is not a stand-alone comment, and the increase in requests for support for reported mental health issues is already mentioned in this chapter. Considering smaller classes was mentioned as an essential aspect of students settling. For instance, a 5level student stated:

On the course I'm at now, there are 30 of us, we all met online through the university Facebook page before starting, and I've made real, lasting friendships.

Another student commented:

Socially for me I was in my element, but **the sudden independence was something I wasn't used to so keeping on top of laundry, food etc. has been a challenge** (L4 UK student).

While another said: "**I found it hard to make friends"** (L 4 UK student).

Everyone is unique and will have individual needs, as seen above. Still, these views are important as every student voice matters. Within the past few years, the induction process at our institution has evolved and developed taking into account students' views, and some of the concerns of those presented regarding personalisation or the need for additional support above have been tackled. We will be discussed later in the chapter.

6.4.3 Improving our whole university approach to induction

A report by HEPI (Seldon and Martin 2018) recognises the complexity of transitions. It discusses the importance of a whole university approach, and something important in order to provide continuity and parity of support to all students. Our institution already took on a whole university approach to its core induction activities. Nevertheless, there seemed to be many avenues for students to seek support and some differed between faculties, and this can be confusing: For example, a level 5 student who attended the symposium stated:

There is so much support that it's easy to get confused and have to be passed around from department to department until you find exactly the team you need to help you. If this was made clearer at the beginning of the year, or if there was better communication between departments, I think it would have made a lot of students' transitions a lot smoother.

Therefore, a review of the available channels to support students during this transition was undertaken to streamline the support and provide more clarity and efficiency. To do so, we looked at our student feedback through the arrival questionnaire from previous years. This, alongside the findings from the symposium as well as a focus group with commencing students during the 2018-2019 academic years revealed that students wanted information in one central place and that this should be delivered taking into account a holistic approach. They wanted as much information as possible before they arrived. For instance, students wanted to know about accommodation but also about mental health or where to join societies. A one-stop place to get their pre-arrival information, which is something we didn't have fully developed.

We knew from previous research that we should not assume students knew anything about the university and that we needed to manage their expectations. Developing appropriate and useful information for students prior to their arrival would be a proactive approach to support student not merely "to cope and get through the period of difficulty" (Seldon and Martin 2018, p. 17), but to support them to learn to manage these difficult moments in their student journey.

To ensure we took all areas into account, we looked at the tourist Metaphor (Devis-Rozental 2018). This metaphor sees a student arriving at a university as a tourist who may or may not have knowledge of the country they are visiting and therefore we as the representatives of the country must not expect any previous knowledge or understanding of the many different aspects that make this country what it is. Table 6. 1 illustrates the types of things these "tourists" may need to learn about in order to thrive while in our country and beyond.

Insert table 6.1 here

Table 6. 1 Decoding The Tourist Metaphor

Looking at students with this lens helped us ensure we were considering every aspect with the same importance. To us, universities are places where students learn holistically and develop not only a craft or academic knowledge but their whole self. We knew that we wanted to engage students before they arrived so that they would feel more confident about their experience and that by going through our resources they could develop a sense of belonging and therefore feel part of our community. Therefore, we developed an online pre-arrival tool with the information we had found was important for students to have. We wanted to take on a positive education approach which considers most students by supporting them in developing the skills they will need to thrive while at university (Seldon and Martin 2018).

When looking at the actual information, we wanted to:

- Provide clear information on physical and digital locations
- Be honest about the realities of being at university and that it isn't easy to leave, for some, everything behind
- Have someone from their own generation talking to them rather than staff
- Give them a personalised induction experience before they arrive

The best way to engage students before they arrived was to develop a pre-arrival tool, they could access once registered, but before they arrived. Even though the online environment may not seem as humanised we knew that it was the only place where we could create meaningful resources that students could access as an when they needed them, before they started university and during their first year.

6.4.4 Online Transitions Tool
Our online tool was Launched in August 2019, hosted in the pre-arrivals area of our intranet and was made available to all L4 (first-year undergraduate) and L7 (postgraduate) commencing students as soon as they registered. As previously mentioned, it was informed by student feedback through the 'Mind the Gap' project as well as focus groups with students and a pre-arrival questionnaire carried out in 2019. It was also informed by relevant research around the area of transitions, positive psychology, humanising concepts and other relevant fields. Its aim was to include information and activities to support students

in their transition from school to university. Each of these areas has been populated with links to various resources, tasks or further information. It has been developed working closely and collaboratively between the Project lead, a Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) developer, an administrative support colleague and working closely with the Director of Student Services whilst seeking content and advice from various teams within the university such as student services, M&C (marketing and communication), library, and others as well as liaising with faculty staff.

The tool consists of 4 areas which were identified as important:

Insert Table 6.2 here

Table 6. 2 Areas to populate our online tool

Our online tool demonstrates a commitment to enhance the student experience and to support students to develop holistically. It also highlights the importance of ensuring students are well informed and that they understand that every aspect of their experience is important and should be considered.

6.4.5 Student engagement with our online tool
During the first seven weeks following its launch our online tool was accessed 31,163 times which suggests a sound usage of the resources. Engagement with the tool increased weekly. An example of this is in the figure 6.1 which shows the number of students engaging with the academic expectations tab over a 7-week period. Interestingly, this was the most visited tab, even though research suggests that study skills may not be as important to students starting university. This incremented usage was representative of all areas where every week more students engaged.

Insert Figure 6.1 here

Figure 6. 1 Engaging with the academic expectations tab during the first seven weeks

6.4.6 Evaluation of our tool
Data regarding our tool has been promising. Of 999 students who completed the pre-arrival survey

55% found it very useful or useful, 37% found it ok and only 8% of students didn't find the tool useful or didn't answer the question.

Student engagement with ME@BU data: We have tracked the number of students who accessed ME@BU before induction week and every week, the number of new students engaging increased. This was evident in every area of the toolkit.

Once the term began, student engagement dwindled as students were able to access the main page of Brightspace. However, they still have access to our online tool during their first year.

6.4.7 Online information

When looking at previous surveys, this year's survey showed an increase in students preferring online pre-arrival material "with 46% of all respondents saying they would like to receive the Welcome Guide in pdf format via email only, compared with 38% last year. Amongst international students (especially non-EU) this preference is stronger with 60% requesting the same. This was also the most common preference for all other types of pre-arrival information." (Arrivals survey). Based on this, our online tool should continue to be included to support students online.

When looking at the amount of information students received "73% of students felt that they received just the right amount of pre-arrival information, with 19% stating they felt they hadn't received enough and only 4% saying they felt they'd received too much." (Arrivals survey). Based on this, consideration must be taken to ensure students continue feeling they are receiving the right amount of information when advertising our online tool.

6.4.8 Moving forward

This was the first year of our online tool, and it demonstrates the commitment that we have to the student experience and to supporting students to engage with the university and thrive. This year, and following the latest arrival survey, we carried out a focus group with students to see specific areas where we can continue developing more meaningful resources for our online tool, to ensure more students engage with it and it impacts positively on their student experience. There are some things we are already looking at changing based on feedback from students. For instance, we have changed the tab 'Thriving at university' to 'Life at university' as students felt that culturally thriving could be confusing. As a living project, we will continue to fine-tune the tool to the needs of students, which will inevitably change as our student population changes.

Following its success, we were asked to develop the tool for all the other transitions students undergo while at university. We are now live, and our tool is available to all students within the university. As each transition has its own nuances and needs, we have considered many aspects. For example, students coming back from placement may join a new cohort and have to make new friends, and this must be acknowledged. We have also been proactive in our approach. As we have all currently moved to work virtually due to Covid 19, we have uploaded specific information to work safely online, to manage isolation and to signpost to where students who need it can seek support.

We are keen to keep our online tool in our academic portal as it demonstrates to students that we see their holistic development as essential and as part of their university experience. We know from research that if students are happy and settled if they have developed meaningful relationships and have all the information they need, they are more likely to succeed (REF), and this is our tool's main aim. However, we mustn't over-rely on our pre-arrival tool. Based on the premise that it is the relationships that students build which helps them thrive, it is vital to look at how staff perceive the induction and their role within it.

6.5 Part two

6.5.1 Staff's engagement on student inductions

In order to seek staff's views on transitions and their tole within induction, we carried out a survey in 2017. It was completed by 58 members of staff of which 47% were academic, 44% professional and 9% other. Staff were asked about their current role within the university. Both academic and professional staff engaged in the survey. This is important as everyone should be involved in the induction regardless of their job role at the university.

The next question looked at their specific role in supporting students. Figure 6.2 shows that most members of staff who answered the survey felt they supported students with their emotional issues, and over half felt that they give student academic and professional guidance.

Insert figure 6.2 here

Figure 6.2Type of support offered to students

Most of those that completed the survey saw their role as supporting students holistically, which is essential as it considers that the emotional context of learning should not be separate from other areas. However, it is vital to ensure that those supporting students have the right training, information or that they can signpost students to the right type of support.

The next question looked to find out if staff felt they were involved with the induction. Interestingly, under half of those who answered stated that they weren't involved in the induction process. In order to have consistency, all members of staff must feel they play a role in the induction. It could be something as simple as giving direction to a student, smiling when we see them or being aware of any students who may feel lost, worried or anxious in order to signpost them to the right type of support.

More needed to be done to ensure every member of staff within the university felt that they were involved in the induction process so that we can support students to develop a sense of belonging more consistently.

6.5.2 Staff's views on Student expectations

Most participants (40) stated that students wanted information during the induction. Thirteen said that students needed a warm welcome and to feel that they belong. This is interesting since, in a previous question, 40 participants mentioned emotional support, so there seemed to be a disparity here regarding their role within induction. One participant said that students expected "orientation and inspiration". And another,

I think that varies enormously from student to student. Some want just to make friends, some want to get immediately into learning new things. Some want to get to know the town better.

Clearly, staff understood the importance of the induction process not as merely an informative activity but an experience that considers individual needs as well as the big change these students will experience.

Participants then were asked about the expectations students have of them during the induction period. Again, a fair amount of participants (23) stated that students expected information from them. Only five said that students expected support while nine added that students expected a welcoming or friendly member of staff. This is not concurring with the previous answer regarding the emotional support given to students. It could be some staff believe that within the first weeks the most important type of provision is to give information. Although without the emotional and social support, it is possible that students will not settle. Three participants stated that honesty was an expectation, which is essential to ensure that students understand the realities of being at university, away from home and in a new social environment so that they can manage difficult times better. From research we know that knowledge gives confidence (Devis-Rozental 2018). Therefore, learning how to manage this new life at university should make students more able to do it.

Some other comments included:

Clarity, Cleverness, Human kindness

A combination of knowledge, empathy, understanding and nothing at all - it depends on the individual.

A warm welcome and assurance that their studies are being managed appropriately, especially if any problems occur.

Here there is an emphasis on human qualities to develop meaningful relationships and support students to develop a sense of belonging. Five members of staff believed that students expected nothing from them. These should be reviewed as clearly if nothing else; students will expect staff to know where to go or how to get somewhere. For instance, in the symposium, one student commented, "whether we should or not, we do have expectations when going into uni". Another one asserted:

I had so many expectations of uni, based on what I'd been told at school, that I got a real shock when I arrived there and everything was different. I suddenly needed to manage my own time; no-one cared if I didn't show up to class, the professors talked AT us, instead of TO us, and we had unrealistic deadlines, straight from week 1.

Therefore, it is important to ensure that all members of staff understand the emotional journey students have when transitioning to university and are vigilant in how to support them or signpost to the appropriate support. Additionally, a clearer message where all staff feel they are involved in the induction, and there is a consistency of approach will ensure a much better student experience.

6.5.3 Staff expectations

Participants were also asked: What do you expect from commencing students during the induction process? Over half of the participants expected students to engage. Some other comments were:

> **"A realisation that this will be a test of their resilience and hard work**. A willingness to accept they will work harder than they have before and that greater independence and engagement will be required of them."

> "To be polite and to speak up if they are feeling lost or overwhelmed. To understand that coming to university is not only about academic study but about being part of something bigger - the community for example

> "Responsibility. Respect. Engagement - turn up to learn face to face! (Otherwise, universities may as well be a non-campus OU model). To familiarise themselves with campuses, transport, locations, rooms."

> "good that they attend sessions. Nevertheless, if they don't attend all sessions, there may be a good reason for this. Don't expect them to engage (i.e. Contribute), scary to do so at this stage."

A variety of meaningful answers which demonstrate the overall commitment staff has to students and the understanding of the variety of needs these students will have depending on their circumstances. Still, 11 participants expected nothing or only for students to turn up. Therefore a better understanding of the complex journey that all students make to get into university, their personal journey and how this is an emotionally charged transition which needs support, understanding and encouragement should be communicated to all staff.

It is important to disseminate information to all staff regarding the barriers to learning and the complex lifeworld of students before they arrive at university and how these can affect their engagement within induction. University staff should spend more time understanding how students are prepared at college (Seldon and Martin 2018).

6.5.4 Usefulness of the induction process

Most respondents saw the induction process as a time to settle in, meet members of staff and make friends. These are three essential aspects that influence a student's choice to stay at university. It is therefore important that the activities are interesting and varied and allow students to meet others and share their experience. It is also important to ensure that staff attitudes and approach are positive, encouraging and engaging to that students can develop effective relationships with members of the university community. Seldon and Martin (2018) suggest improving transition arrangements within HE by having an opting-out system to disclose mental health issues; contact by a personal mentor (L5 undergraduate student) before induction week as well as information to manage their transitions before the students' arrival. The last two points were also highlighted during the symposium as important in the transition from school

We must continue embedding a positive approach to encourage all staff to develop effective relationships with students proactively, and to support students in developing a sense of belonging.

Working together to find the "perfect host"

During the symposium discussed previously in this chapter, students and staff shared ideas on the 'perfect host' for an induction programme. The rationale was to allow participants to reflect on their practice and the wider context within the university. The main conclusion was that one person could not have all the qualities needed, therefore the importance of teams to deliver an excellent experience. This is why it is vital that all members of staff, regardless of where they work within the university, feel part of the induction process. That they know and understand their roles, but also their limitations and where to signpost students if necessary.

According to the participants in this workshop, some of the qualities needed to be the perfect host were:

Insert Figure 6.3 here

Figure 6.3 Finding the perfect host

There was a general agreement from staff and students that students should be involved in the induction process with Student reps or Student ambassador and someone to create a personal link with each student. Interestingly all the words that appeared for the perfect host describe a very human person, not too corporate or overly professionalised.

6.6 One size doesn't fit all
Clearly, throughout this chapter, we have illustrated that within the context of student support, one type of approach may not be suitable for everyone. For instance, when looking at mental health support, a typical approach to address this may be to focus on increasing the resource in university counselling services. While this will meet an immediate need, it is not sustainable, and we also find that many students do not need counselling but alternative approaches. For this reason, at our institution, Student Services focuses on the whole person rather than their symptoms and in this way, we aim to deliver a more humanised provision.

We provide specific information pre-arrival, as mentioned within this chapter, to allow students to understand - and normalise -the specific challenges that they are likely to face as an individual, including isolation, loneliness and a lack of practical and academic skills and we support students to develop these. ME@BU is intended to encourage students to think about their own personal and academic development needs prior to arrival to avoid some of the culture shock they may experience.

Integrating our sports department and residential services into Student Services has allowed us to focus on health and wellness promotion alongside mental health support. Our residential life programme is, unusually, delivered in partnership with a number of accommodation providers and involves three strands – welfare, social and skills. Welfare coordinators are available in halls as a first point of contact for anyone who needs any form of support or who just has a general question relating to their living environment. This team will signpost to those best placed to support the student, including in some cases, Student Wellbeing or our Student Support and Engagement team. The social strand of residential life is designed to prevent isolation and therefore prevent loneliness and anxiety. With activities co-delivered by the residential life team, our sports department and our students' union it offers access to a large range of activities, both physical and virtual. Furthermore, our skills strand is designed to help students to develop their life skills through activities such as cooking demonstrations.

Of course, Student Services are not just there to support students, and their advice for academic and other professional services staff is invaluable to ensure that students can access all sources of support available to them in an accessible way.

As has been alluded to throughout this chapter, each student is an individual and will bring their own experiences and expectations. There is a tendency in HE always to consider the 18-year-old school leaver, living in halls and away from home for the first time, as our only new entrant. In reality, the majority of the student community at our institution does fall into this category, but we also have a substantial number of students who aren't. Mature students, those returning to study after a break, those who have decided to have a change in career, students with dependents, commuter students, all will have different needs and expectations. Even for those 18-year olds, their life experiences to date

will have prepared them very differently for university. The care leaver with little emotional support may be more resilient than the straight-A student with a supportive (emotionally and financially) family. However, they will not have the same network to call on to understand how the university works. It's for that reason that transitions and induction activities need to be sensitive to individual needs and flexible enough to ensure it is relevant to all. Additionally, all staff must be aware of the vital role they can play in ensuring students develop a sense of belonging by understanding the complexity of needs and how to support or signpost to the right team those students entering a HE environment.

6.7 Conclusions and suggestions

The enhancement of our provision and the pre-arrival tool we have developed, as well as our induction process support students in gaining the skills they need within a holistic context. Students' comments are encouraging, and although they found the 'jump' to university scary, the students involved in this research project settled well and enjoyed their university experience. We should continue building on this success and improve practice by considering the following suggestions based on the recommendations presented throughout this chapter:

1. Develop an awareness that every member of the university community plays an essential role during the induction period, which is an emotionally charged time for all students
2. Continue working with schools to develop an awareness of life at university, including academic and practical skills to help students settle better
3. Develop effective communication between different departments and services to signpost students to the right type of support effectively and to provide a more consistent approach
4. Continue engaging current students as role models in the induction process and pre-arrival to ensure commencing students develop connections
5. Continue developing a more personalised and user-friendly online presence that includes key information for pre arriving students
6. Ensure all areas of the university provide a consistent approach where all students can access the same type of support considering their individual needs.
7. Assign a mentor (either student or staff) to make contact with each student during the induction week to ensure students develop a sense of belonging and feel there is someone they can talk to or seek advice from.

The transition to university is a complex issue and students will approach it in various ways depending on the skills they have, and the resilience they would have built before they arrive at university. Therefore, universities must shape their Student Services provision to cater for their needs, in a way that takes into account a more humanised approach where students develop self-efficacy and flourish. What is more, all staff, whichever role they do, must know that they do have an impact on students' induction, retention and success. It is indeed everyone's responsibility to support students if it is part of our role, or, to know where to signpost them so that they can have the best experience by getting the right support at the right time.

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