**Skills for Success? Supporting transition into higher education for students from diverse backgrounds.**

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**Abstract**

Effective support during transition into Higher Education (HE) can be crucial, especially for traditionally under-represented student groups. Student feedback that the traditional ‘welcome week’ can be overwhelming due to the quantity and speed of information imparted, coupled with the request for increased support for non-academic skills, led to the development of the ‘Skills for Success’ (SfS) extended transition support unit. Co-devised with the student body and delivered by a range of academic, clinical and professional support staff, SfS was highly regarded by students, with particular impact reported on mental health and motivation to achieve. Following the introduction of SfS, attainment differences were closed or reversed, in the academic module within which the unit was embedded, for students who were mature, reported a mental health condition, or were from Black, Asian or Minority Ethnicity (BAME) backgrounds. Independent evaluation revealed the initiative had raised awareness of how to access support services and almost half the participants had shared aspects of the learning with peers outside of the cohort. Overall, the success of SfS suggests that an extended package of integrated, holistic support can ease transition into HE and may improve the attainment of students from under-represented groups.

**Key words** Student success, transition, wellbeing, induction, diversity, foundation, BAME, IMD, mature, skills, fresher, attainment gap, support services

Introduction

Transition to higher education (HE) has received increasing attention in recent years due to the critical role it plays in setting expectations, building staff-student relationships and ultimately for student success and retention (Williamson et al., 2011). The challenge of successful transition into HE can include the emotional and psychological aspects of developing independence and self-identity, which can be particularly challenging for those in the ‘emerging adult’ bracket (Arnett, 2000) who can experience significant feelings of instability during this formative stage, relying heavily on guidance to hone their self-identity (Arnett et al., 2014). In addition, transition to HE requires students to gain the confidence required to adapt to more self-directed methods of learning (Agonacs and Matos, 2019), moving away from teacher-centred pedagogical methods they may be familiar with, towards andragogy, with the student deciding *how* to learn the content the lecturer has provided them with, and finally to heutagogy, with the student able to decide both *how* to learn and *what* to include in a customisable curriculum tailored to their own needs (Hase, 2014).

HE institutions traditionally provide a large amount of information on the support available when students first arrive, often as part of student orientation week, or ‘freshers’ week’. Effective transition support is particularly crucial for students from groups traditionally under-represented in HE who may experience additional challenges during this period. For example, students in the lowest index of multiple deprivation (IMD) quintile (OfS, 2019), who are four times as likely to be ‘first-in family’ students (Motsabi et al., 2020; O’Shea, 2020), students who report mental health conditions (OfS, 2019), mature students (Fragoso et al., 2013) and students who identify as being from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups (Keels, 2019) are among those identified as at higher risk of experiencing transitional difficulties.

The challenges experienced by such students have been attributed to diverse, complex and intersecting factors such as socio-economic status, caring responsibilities and the compatibility of the students sense of identity with the culture of the institution. Bourdieu’s theory of capital and habitus (2004; 2006) has been invoked as a lens to locate and describe the difficulties faced by students who enter HE without the traditionally required resources or an understanding of the ‘rules of the game’ compared to those students who have a family history of participation (Yorke and Thomas, 2003).

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have for some years been working to improve the transition of students from the backgrounds described. Student induction packages conventionally offer information about academic, financial and welfare support services, typically during the ‘freshers’ week at the start of the first semester. Accessing support services in a timely way has been linked to improved outcomes for students, and so the provision of this information is crucial (Cotton, Kneale and Nash, 2013). However, there are significant challenges to ensuring that students have sufficient information about, and confidence in, student support services to enable them to access support when it is needed.

Developing ‘Skills for Success’

At one university in the East Midlands of the UK it was clear from ongoing feedback from new students and the anecdotal experiences of the staff involved in supporting them, that the traditional welcome, or ‘freshers’ week, could be overwhelming. The sheer quantity of information imparted led to ‘information overload’ (Action on Access, 2009; Spacey and Mossop, 2019). Key information such as the location and types of student support services (the utility of which will not be immediately obvious) was being lost or forgotten (Keenan, 2008; Smyth and Lodge, 2012). Many researchers and practitioners now recommend a ‘longer and thinner’ induction approach, particularly for students from groups typically underrepresented in HE (Crosling et al, 2009), thus, a semester long transition support unit named ‘Skills for Success’ (SfS) was incorporated into an existing, compulsory Study Skills module and delivered for the first time in Autumn 2019. The SfS unit was designed and piloted by the university’s Science Foundation Year (SFY) programme team. Foundation year programmes in HE cater to the needs of students who do not meet the standard entry requirements to progress directly to their chosen undergraduate programme. In the UK context, foundation year cohorts typically include more mature students and those from less economically privileged groups than conventional undergraduate programmes (Nathwani, 2019). SfS was a compulsory but non-credit bearing unit and aimed to address the predominantly non-academic challenges which this cohort faced while adjusting to university life. Lauricella and MacAskill(2015) report that many university students would appreciate more support with the ‘non-academic’ aspects of University, and SFY personal tutors often found that challenges such as maintaining positive mental health; resilience under pressure; time management; a healthy diet; regular exercise and managing finances, were having a significant impact on students’ ability to fulfil their potential. Tutors were also keen to develop provision that pre-empted some of the signposting to support services in times of acute need in the hope that a proactive approach may reduce the need for reactive responses during a crisis.

From an early stage in the development of SfS, the importance of tailoring the programme to the needs of the cohort was recognised. Drawing on the student co-production ethos of ‘Student as Producer’ (Neary and Winn, 2009), and on the work of Bovill et al. (2011)  which suggests that including students in curriculum design increases engagement, promotes empowerment and a enables a feeling of inclusion in university culture, the SFY team collaborated with the student cohort to design the programme. Using tutor group discussion forums and a whole cohort SFY ‘Action Day’, students worked in groups to discuss which areas they felt were important to include. The suggestions were compiled to produce an overall ‘student wish-list’, including diverse skills such as managing exam anxiety, budgeting and insomnia.

Recognising that student support staff have tacit knowledge or ‘practice wisdom’ (Zeira and Rosen, 2000) regarding common transitional challenges, guidance was sought from the Heads of Student Support and Student Wellbeing, as well as SFY personal tutors, and their expertise was utilised to expand the programme. In addition, professional service staff from the Library, Digital Education, Careers Service, the Student Advice Centre and Mental Health advisors also designed sessions, with the aim of supporting students to develop the cultural and social capital required to find and access the support available on campus. With this approach of student-staff co-design, and the determination to include everything on the student’s list, it was hoped that the programme would achieve a harmony between the interests of the students and the priorities identified by staff. Finally, to develop students’ habitus by familiarising them with wider aspects of university life and culture, academic colleagues from a range of disciplines across campus produced sessions based on the ‘request list’ produced by the students. An overview of the course curriculum is shown in Figure 1.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Skills for Success core curriculum** | | | |
| **Digital Literacy** | **Wellbeing** | **Finance and Careers** | **Academic Support** |
| Video production and editing | Homesickness | Managing your career | Time management |
| Emotional intelligence and confidence building | Working while studying: understanding payslips and tax | Note taking in lectures |
| Coding | Mindfulness-based strength practice | Budgeting |
| Programming | Mental health and stress-resilience | English Language support |
| Sleep | Accommodation rental contracts |
| Effective literature searches | Procrastination | Organisation and goal setting |
| Managing exam anxiety | Social media and employability |
| Office 365 | Nutrition and exercise | Revision and memory training |

*Figure 1.  The ‘Skills for success’ transition programme included a range of lectures and workshops aimed at developing students’ non-academic skills to support transition into Higher Education.*

Evaluation Methods

Staff involved in developing SfS wanted to ascertain if this pilot programme had been impactful, in terms of student attainment, students’ knowledge of and willingness to access support services, and in their overall experience of transition. As first steps towards ascertaining answers to these questions the following evaluation activities were undertaken.

**A. Online polling**

Anonymous student feedback was gathered at the end of each SfS session, forming a ‘light-touch’ process evaluation to determine student satisfaction, with responses enabling the programme to be refined as it was rolled out (University Ethics Committee approval reference 2019-0899). Two open-ended questions were posed with students asked to comment briefly on any short-term impact that the session had upon them and suggestions for future development of the course.

**B. Attainment analysis**

Students’ attainment in the Study Skills module (in which the SfS programme was delivered), which included skills-based assessments such as presentations, academic and reflective writing, was compared with attainment in the same module in the year before SfS commenced. Attainment differences for students with attributes identified by the Office for Students (2021) as associated with a higher risk for experiencing transitional difficulties were investigated. The Index of Multiple Deprivation is a UK government measure of relative deprivation for small areas of England, combining information regarding income, employment, education, skills and training, health, crime, housing, services and living environment (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2019). The IMD quintile for each participant was extracted using their home postcode. Index of Average attainment was obtained by calculating the mean of the final module mark for the Study Skills module for all students who were identified as having that attribute within their student record. Comparisons were then made in line with the Office for Students analysis, for example the average attainment of students who had identified as being from a Minority Ethnic group were compared against the average attainment of students identifying as White, average attainment of students whose home address is listed as being in IMD Quintile 5 was compared with those whose address is listed as being in IMD Quintile 1, students who were identified as mature (≥ 21 years at entry) were compared with those who were identified as young, and students who disclosed they had a mental health condition were compared with those who did not identify as having a mental health condition.

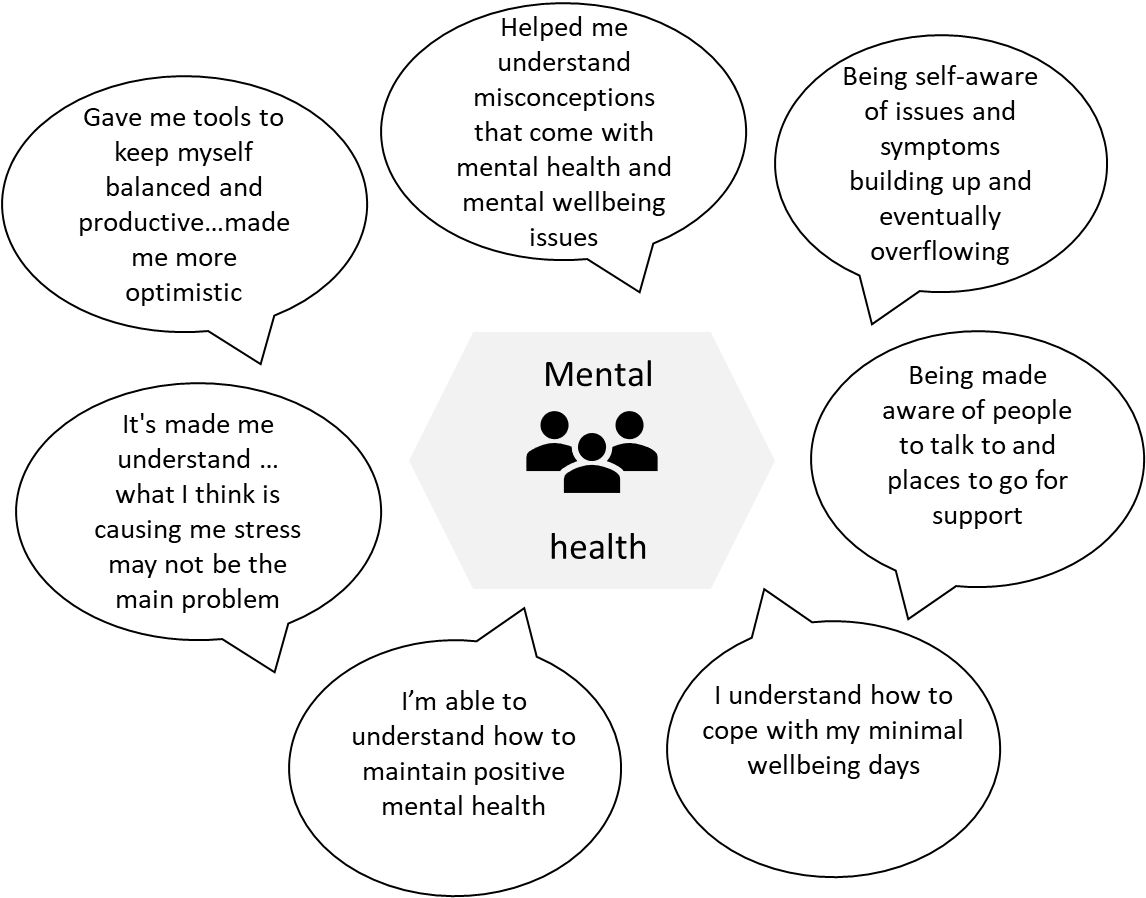
**C. Independent summative evaluation**

Following course completion, the cohort were invited to complete an online questionnaire to assess their perceptions of the impact of the course (University Ethics Committee approval reference number 2020-0987). For pragmatic reasons, an opportunity/convenience sample was utilised. The SFY programme staff invited all students within the cohort to take part and participation was incentivised through optional inclusion in a prize draw. Following a data cleanse to remove invalid entries from the summative survey responses 50.9% of the cohort (n= 112 from a total population of 220) were included in the analysis. Demographic characteristics of the survey respondents were compared to the demographic profile of the cohort and found to be similar. Following the closure of the survey a basic descriptive analysis of the scale data was carried out, and free text comments were analysed thematically, drawing on the possible outcomes identified, and any emerging but unanticipated effects and experiences recorded by participants.

Evaluation Results

**A. Online polling**

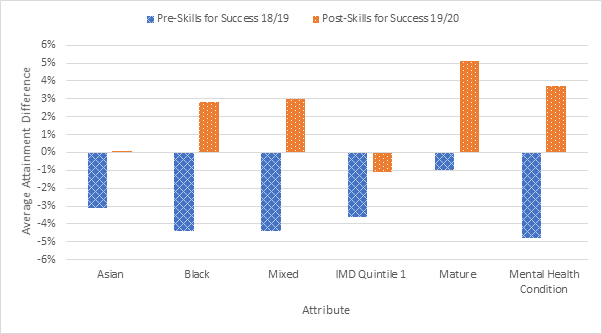
Mean response rate to the online polls following each SfS session was 76% (135 of a maximum of 178 students in attendance at each session). Comments were thematically analysed with impact on mental health and motivation to achieve emerging as significant themes (Figure 2). Suggestions for improvement included moving financial workshops earlier in the semester when the advice was more timely, enabling smaller group workshops to allow more discussion and increasing the degree of choice of sessions to attend each week. Where possible suggestions which could be implemented mid-programme were actioned by the programme team, for example the addition of coding skills workshops for digitally confident students.



*Figure 2. Example comments received through anonymous online student polling immediately following Skills for Success sessions*

**B. Attainment analysis**

Attainment data for the Study Skills transition module pre- (2018-19) and post- (2019-20) implementation of SfS demonstrates higher average module scores for students with background characteristics identified as higher risk for experiencing transitional difficulties within the SfS cohort. For example, Figure 3 shows an increase in relative attainment for Asian students (2018/19, -3.1%; 2019/20, +0.1%) Black students (2018/19, -4.4%; 2019/20, +2.8%), students with mixed ethnicities (2018/19, -4.4%; 2019/20, +3%), mature students (2018/19, -1%; 2019/20, +5.1%) and students who reported that they had a mental health condition (2018/19, -4.8%; 2019/20, +3.7%). Students in the lowest quintile for the index of multiple deprivation (IMD1) still achieved very slightly lower than students in the highest quintile, however the difference was reduced (2018/19, -3.6%; 2019/20, -1.1%).



*Figure 3. The differences in average attainment, pre and post-Skills for Success, for students identifying with characteristics identified by the OfS as associated with higher risk of transition challenges (18/19, n = 154; 19/20, n = 210)*

It should be noted that for group attributes shown in Figure 3, the shift in relative attainment has persisted in analysis of the 2020/21 cohort. This data is not presented as the module was delivered online during the Covid pandemic, thus many parameters (such as the use of captioned, asynchronous videos rather than face to face lectures) were substantially different from 2018/19, thus the data was less comparable. Although no causal link can be proven between participating in SfS and improved scores, the continuation of the trend is very encouraging, and attainment will continue to be monitored by the programme team.  
  
**C. Independent summative evaluation**

The summative evaluation survey was carried out between February and April 2020 following the students’ completion of the SfS unit. The short survey instrument comprised questions designed to assess student perceptions of the programme and to obtain some insight into the possible impact of the programme on participant attitudes towards help seeking. Responses to the scale questions are presented in Figure 4. The survey also included an option to provide a written response to each question. Examples of these are included in the analysis below.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Survey responses summary table** | | | | | | | |
| **Survey question** | **Frequency (valid percentage\*)** | | | | | | |
| **How far do you agree with the following statements about Skills for Success?** | **Strongly agree** | **Agree** | **Somewhat agree** | **Neither agree nor disagree** | **Somewhat disagree** | **Disagree** | **Strongly disagree** |
| 1. *I learned something as part of the Skills for Success programme that was new or a useful reminder* | 14 (13.5) | 34 (32.7) | 33 (31.7) | 9 (8.7) | 6 (5.8) | 5 (4.8) | 3 (2.9) |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. *The programme was useful and relevant to me* | 9 (8.7) | 23 (22.1) | 45 (43.3) | 8 (7.7) | 9 (8.7) | 7 (6.7) | 3 (2.9) |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. *I gained something positive from taking part in the programme* | 12 (11.5) | 32 (30.8) | 36 (34.6) | 15 (12.5) | 4 (3.8) | 5 (4.8) | 2 (1.9) |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. *The programme helped me to feel confident to access extra support with study skills if I need to* | 12 (11.5) | 29 (27.9) | 31 (29.8) | 15 (14.4) | 7 (6.7) | 6 (5.8) | 4 (3.8) |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. *The programme helped me to understand where to go for support with my physical health* | 17 (16.3) | 34 (32.7) | 29 (27.9) | 17 (13.5) | 4 (3.8) | 5 (4.8) | 1 (1.0) |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. *The programme helped me to know what to do if I experience difficulties with my mental health* | 21 (20.2) | 28 (26.9) | 27 (26.0) | 13 (12.5) | 9 (8.7) | 4 (3.8) | 2 (1.9) |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. *I shared something I learned from the programme with another student* | 12 (11.5) | 18 (17.3) | 19 (18.3) | 20 (19.2) | 8 (7.1) | 16 (15.4) | 11 (10.6) |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. *I feel that Skills for Success has improved my university experience so far* | 8 (7.7) | 19 (18.3) | 29 (27.9) | 23 (22.1) | 11 (10.6) | 5 (8.7) | 5 (4.8) |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| \*All survey questions were optional; therefore ‘valid percentage’ (excluding missing data) is presented here.  *Figure 4: Summary of responses to scale questions, summative evaluation (n = 112)* | | | | | | | |

Most students indicated that they had a positive experience of SfS, as indicated by responses to questions 1-3. Disagreement about the relevance and enjoyment of the programme between participants may have been linked to the obligation to attend mandatory sessions. A desire for non-mandatory sessions targeted to specific needs and interests was expressed by students during the early stages of the process evaluation, and the SFY team responded by creating option blocks so that students could choose which session to attend in a particular time slot. The aim was to promote a range of different skills that would be beneficial to different members of the diverse cohort; for example, a workshop on housing deposits and rental contracts, while hugely welcomed by some, was unlikely to be of interest to students living at home, therefore digital skills confidence building, advanced coding and time management workshops ran in parallel.

However, a few participants in the summative evaluation were still expressing a degree of dissatisfaction with mandatory sessions. Qualitative comments indicated that perceptions of relevance were not always linked to satisfaction for participants. The reasons for this were not entirely clear from the responses, but may have been linked to students’ level of engagement with the programme content. For example several students made reference to the session on the psychology of sleep, stating that although not strictly relevant or useful (*“it didn’t necessarily help me sleep”*) they found the session stimulating (*”really interesting...I’m glad I was taught about it”*). Engaging “*interactive*” presentations, creative approaches to subjects and ‘guest’ speakers were valued. Where dissatisfaction was expressed, this was frequently linked to the duration (sessions were perceived to be *“too long”*) or delivery-style (the *“lecture style”* presentation of information) of the sessions rather than the particular subject. There was evidence that some students would have preferred a less intensive programme, with sessions shorter in length and/or less frequent (for example, fortnightly instead of weekly).

When asked about the emphasis of future programme iterations, participants were positive about student involvement in relation to programme content, and reflecting individual needs and interests was identified as a priority. Respondents were asked if they supported the statement that Skills for Success had improved their awareness of how to access student support services in relation to study skills, physical and mental health (questions 4-6, Figure 2). Most students supported the statement (i.e. answered “Strongly agree”, “Agree” or “Somewhat agree”) that it had done so. Specifically 69.2% (n=72) supported the statement that they felt confident to access support with study skills as a result of Skills for Success; 76.9% (n=80) supported the statement that they knew how to access support with their physical health as a result of participation and 73.1% (n=76) supported the statement that they knew what to do if they experienced mental health difficulties.

Some participants made a link between attending the sessions and visiting the Wellbeing and Library services, indicating that for some participants, the sessions had supported their confidence in accessing support. For example, one participant stated, *‘I’m able to understand how to maintain positive mental health and I’m aware of people to go to and places to go for support’*. Others reported more general benefits to their health, for example, an enhanced understanding of “*how to keep myself healthy and positive*” or *“how to monitor my physical and mental health and structure my life around that*”.

Discussion with project stakeholders had identified a need to better understand the possible programme impacts not just upon individual participants but also on their wider peer networks. Participants were asked if they had shared any learning from Skills for Success with another student (question 7 in Figure 4). Almost half (n=49 or 47.1%) said that they had done so suggesting potential impact beyond the target cohort through peer-peer interactions.   
  
*“The stress [lecture] was great for giving me ideas on stress management and the stress bucket analogy was brilliant and I've used that with several of my friends to help them manage stress”.*

Some participants recorded unanticipated benefits from taking part, for example, helping to form new friendships. However it was not clear from the comments if this was simply a result of typical classroom interactions (these sessions were delivered face-to-face) or if there was something specifically about the non-academic nature of the subject and discussions which facilitated social bonding.

Participants were asked if they thought that taking part in Skills for Success had improved their University experience so far (question 8 in Figure 4). Responses were broadly positive, though less emphatically so than for the other questions. Just over half (n=56 or 53.9%) supported the statement, 24.1% (n=21) disputed the statement and 22.1% (n=23) gave a neutral response. Examples of direct positive impact reported included improvements in experiences of homesickness, stress and self-confidence.

Discussion

Johannson and Felton (2014) characterise the transition experience as a search for familiarity and safety in an unfamiliar environment, the pursuit of which enables students to explore and engage more fully, developing the capitals required to navigate the institution, the academic structures and conventions, and the habitus to thrive there. In this context, SfS may have helped to support the development of a perception of security highlighting support mechanisms and facilitating acquisition of a sense of ‘belonging’ by offering a means to engage with professional service staff, academic staff and research both within and beyond students’ immediate academic programme. The links drawn by several participants between the intervention and the consolidation of peer networks were an unanticipated but interesting outcome, since a body of research suggests that formation of positive social relationships is key to supporting successful transition to HE (e.g. Whittaker, 2008; Maunder et al, 2013). Although the role of peer feedback and knowledge exchange in relation to academic achievement is relatively well studied (Liu and Carless, 2006; Simonsmeier et al, 2018), the effects of knowledge exchange via informal peer networks on other aspects of HE participation are not well understood. The number of participants indicating that they had shared programme information though their peer networks is therefore of interest and merits further investigation.

Provision of high quality, timely support has been linked to improved outcomes for first year students (Maymon et al, 2019). The preliminary data on attainment presented in this study supports the notion that a focus on development of non-academic skills during the first few months of HE study can be beneficial to students’ academic achievement. In relation to help-seeking, research indicates that ‘non-traditional’ students (that is students who identify with characteristics associated with under-representation in HE) are most in need of support services, but less able to access them. For example, Blair, Cline and Wallace (2010) note that mature students experience particularly high levels of anxiety in relation to assessments but find it difficult to acknowledge a need for help as a result of both practical and psychological factors; Quinn et al (2009) highlighted the stigma associated with seeking help amongst many student groups in relation to mental health. To address these challenges, Nakata et al. (2019) describe the importance of normalising the use of academic and personal support services for students whose backgrounds mean that they arrive in HE less well prepared than their peers. It is therefore possible that part of the success of the intervention in supporting this outcome was due to normalising, or perhaps ‘de-stigmatising’ the use of these services, although further study is required to confirm this as a mechanism and to understand if there are specific benefits for particular student groups. The attainment data post SfS implementation tentatively suggests that the student groups highlighted may now be achieving slightly more highly than the groups they were compared against. Could a possible explanation for this be that, with a thorough transition and skills building package, students who may have previously faced additional barriers to learning are more able to fulfil their potential and flourish beyond the academic expectation for their cohort?

The attainment difference for students from the lowest IMD quintile narrowed following SfS, but was not completely eliminated, therefore, a future focus as the programme evolves will be to continue to address skills and challenges that might be faced by this particular group of students, especially as there are concerns that studying during and after the Covid pandemic may increase the impact of digital poverty (Whalley et al., 2021) in addition to other challenges faced by this group of students, such as the need to seek employment alongside study, the higher likelihood that students are the first in their family to enter HE (Wylie, 2015) and may experience a lower sense of belonging (Spiegler and Bednarek, 2013).

The strong preference expressed by participants for optional sessions reflecting individual interests and concerns was a common theme within the free text survey responses. However, caution should be exercised in relation to the removal of mandatory sessions. Some research suggests that new students may not be in a position to judge what information will be useful in the future. For example Barton (2017) links student perceptions of induction with the Dunning-Kruger effect (Kruger and Dunning, 1999) whereby individuals tend to overestimate their knowledge in areas where they actually lack competence, and Breeze et al (2020) reported low attendance at non-compulsory induction programme sessions in their study. For students experiencing financial precarity a non-credit bearing unit may seem an unwelcome obstruction to the earning potential of part-time work, at least in the short term, a factor identified by Bennett et al. (2008) as a barrier to engagement in their HE orientation programme.

Conclusion

The SfS transition support programme was delivered in the first Semester of the 2019-20 academic year with the aim of supporting the development of non-academic skills and supporting transition into HE The scope and content of the programme was student-led with the SfS programme team curating a timetable of lectures and workshops delivered by professional and academic staff from a wide range of support services and colleges across the institution. This student-driven, collaborative approach was well received by participating students, who reported the impact on their understanding of, and support available, for mental health and motivation challenges. Furthermore, preliminary data suggests that a focus on non-academic skill development during a longer transition period may have a positive impact upon attainment for under-represented student groups such as those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups, mature students and those who report mental health conditions. Therefore, such an ‘extended welcome’, may be one approach to add to the sector efforts to reduce attainment differences for students with such attributes (Cotton et al., 2015; Universities UK, 2018).

The work documented here also highlights how the pragmatic use of evaluation methodologies and methods can support and build understanding even where resources are limited. The evaluation, although somewhat limited in scope, provided some evidence of the programme impacts. Most survey respondents agreed that they felt more confident to access support with study skills, and more knowledgeable about mental and physical health support services at the University. Some evidence indicated that unit participation did support willingness to access support services for some participants, however, evidence of behavioural change derived from institutional data is required to provide a robust evidence base for this outcome. Approximately half of the survey participants agreed that Skills for Success improved their transition to university, although a considerable proportion (around a quarter) offered a neutral response. Perceived benefits of taking part went beyond the anticipated outcomes, including developing friendships and sharing programme learning with wider peer groups. Taking account of the literature on student transition programmes, the effects of unit participation may not be apparent to the cohort in the short term, and a follow up survey or longitudinal study would therefore be useful to explore this further.

This small-scale evaluation project also highlighted some areas for further investigation, notably whether providing a choice of which sessions to attend improves the student experience and efficacy of transition through personalising the journey, or whether removing compulsory attendance from some sessions results in gaps in knowledge that students may not realise will impact them until later in their degree. Perhaps providing clear reasoning behind the inclusion of each session (including testimonials from students in later years of their programmes or sensitive dissemination of the attainment data) may be one approach to ensure the value is clear from the outset. It is unclear if the nature of this foundation year programme, which incorporates significantly higher levels of student support than typical undergraduate programmes, impacted upon the students’ experiences of SfS and some caution should be employed in relation to assumptions that these results would be replicated with other cohorts in different academic contexts. Nonetheless, it was a significant achievement to develop a programme with students and to continuously respond to the cohort’s interests and experiences. Flexible teaching that responds to student needs, a concept Sibold(2016) terms ‘*Learning A-La Carte*’, is a concept that has particular resonance during the current pandemic-related teaching climate where face to face teaching may be a limited and precious commodity, enabling students to personalise their learning journeys and reap the most benefit from their face-to-face time with staff.

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