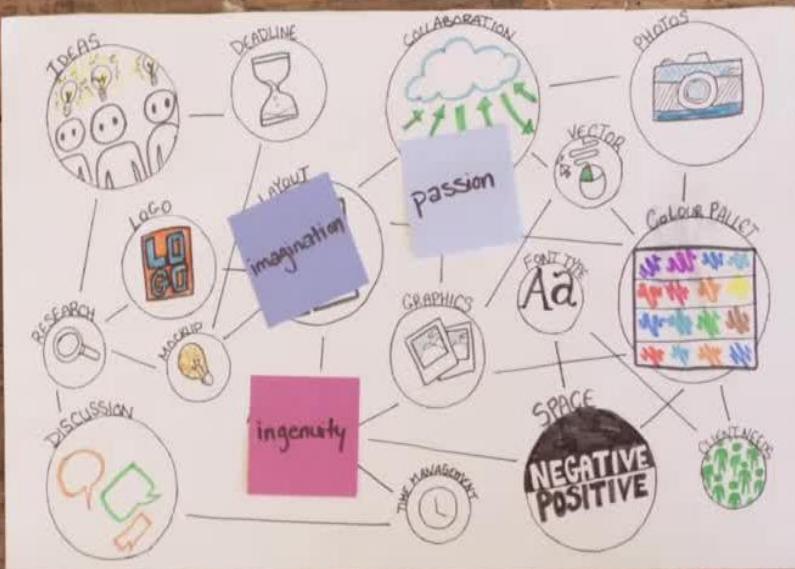# Using block delivery to ease the transition to higher education for first year students

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Session Overview

- Ideas that shaped the move to block (immersive scheduling) at Plymouth

- Introducing the 'Curriculum Enrichment Project' (CEP) & it's evaluation

- Outcomes
  - Building social relations
  - Promoting academic integration
  - Scaffolding student learning
  - Framing study skills
  - Managing expectations

Tinto's (1975) Model of Student Integration
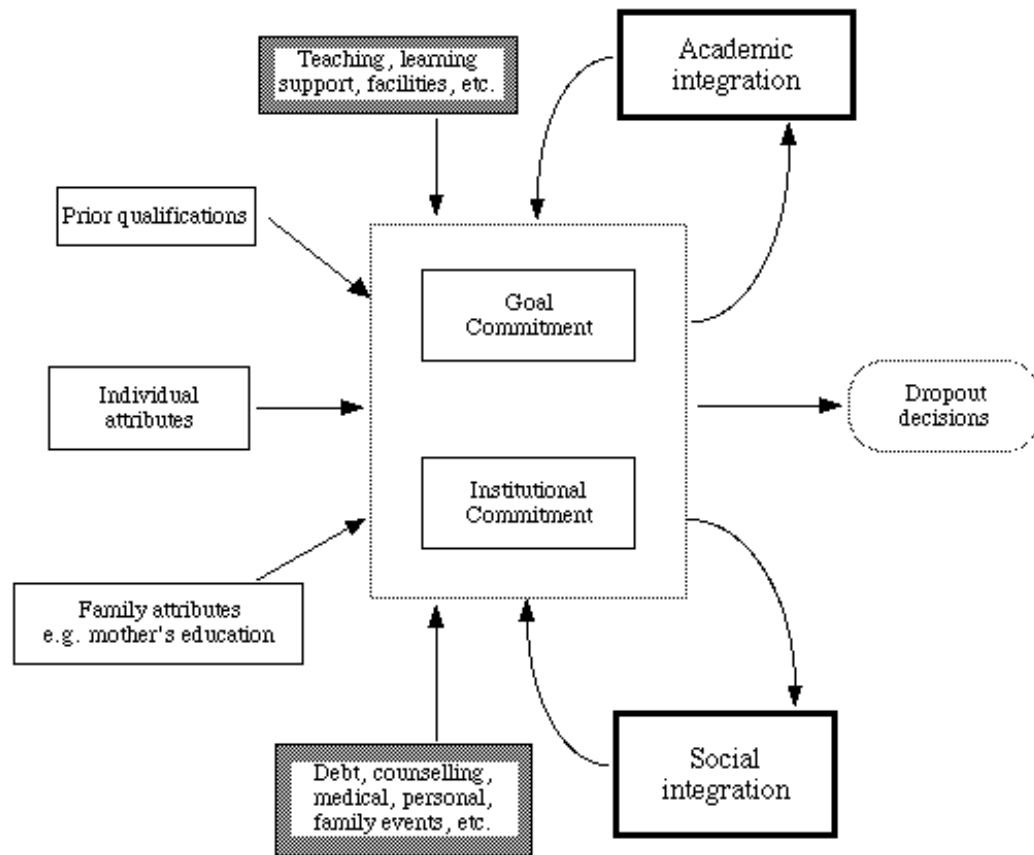
- Tinto (2003) called for institutional-level change that:
- Fosters learning
- Expects success
- Provides clear & consistent information
- Provides academic, social & personal support
- Involves students in the institution

But it is about more than integration:

Self-efficacy: a threat becomes a challenge
Attribution retraining
- Instructor modelling
- Peer leader modelling
- Student successes overtime
- Sense of control over learning
- Underpinned by feedback

(Karademes & Kalantzi-Aziz, 2004; Chemers et al., 2001; Kallenback & Zaft, 2004)

And not forgetting WP

- Prior learning a major factor in student retention
  - Sense of preparedness underpins withdrawal, non-traditional students particularly 'at risk' of withdrawal (Merrill & Johnston 2011)
  - Mismatched expectations between students & lecturers regarding skills students possess

  - 'look beyond rhetoric of widening participation' (Reay et al., 2002)

  - **UoP :** 29.7% of 1st years from lower socio-economic background, 12.6% of the FT UG population have a declared disability

Curriculum Enrichment Project (CEP)

Cross institutional curriculum change

- 1st year immersive modules
  - Semester 1 (I1): Introduction to the key principles of the discipline and contextualises the programme to the wider world
  - Semester 2 (I2): Plymouth Plus – interdisciplinary modules

- 2 hour teaching blocks, emphasising active learning inc. student-led study, group work & use of approaches such as flipped classroom.

- Inclusive assessment inc. quick delivery of FB. Mitigate the need for MAPs
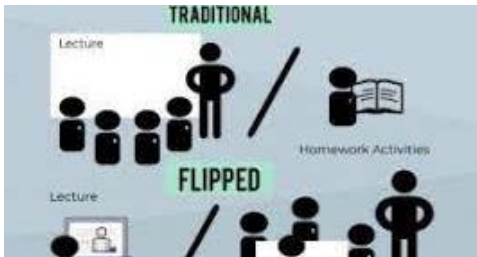
Structure of the first-year curriculum

Semester	Week number	Module format	
1	1-4	Immersive module 1 (20 credits) Short and fat, intensive delivery Assessment completed and submitted at the end of module	
	5-13	Traditional module (20 credits)	Traditional module (20 credits)
		Long and thin, parallel delivery	
	14-15	Assessment period for traditional format, semester 1 modules	
2	16-19	Immersive module 2 (20 credits) Short and fat, intensive delivery Assessment completed and submitted at the end of module	
	20-28	Traditional module (20 credits)	Traditional module (20 credits)
		Long and thin, parallel delivery	
	29-30	Assessment period for traditional format, semester 2 modules	

Aims of the evaluation: 3-year programme

- Capture experiences and outcomes of first year students initially through the CEP 'early adopter' group, then more widely as CEP rolled out;
  - Yr1: Health & Business ethnographic study 1
    - Included a comparative survey across all first years
  - Yr2: Arts & Science ethnographic study 2
  - Yr3: Retention & Attainment data
- Examine lecturers' experiences of adapting their teaching and adopting different pedagogies to align with CEP principles (inclusive of both immersive modules)

- Evaluation informed by the work of Roni Bamber 'evidencing value'. (Bamber, 2013)
  - Multiple sources of data, multiple methods and viewpoints (Cousins, 2009; Bamber, 2013)
    - Reported on an on-going basis throughout the roll out

Building Social relations

- Positive impact on students' sense of social integration supported by explicit use of group work & active learning practices, for example:

  - *"If you didn't get to all of the places or you, sort of, messed up and went to the wrong place, it was just a laugh, and it wasn't too serious. But it did link in with [names degree programme] well. It was fun".* Business Programme student FG

- Assisted by sustained exposure to the same peers / academic staff, for example:
  - *"You're happy to sit with anybody because we all know each other and we're all friends, and there isn't a feeling of, you know, 'I don't want to sit with them.' You know, everyone, and I think that has come from those exercises and the way that the module was put together."*

  Health Programme student FG

Turner et al., 2017

Building social relations in the classroom

Team building activities lead into group work:

"Working in groups enabled us to discuss our worries about the assessment"   (Business Programme FG)

"I most enjoyed working as part of a team. Trying to get my point across in a working environment"

(Business Programme ME)

Turner et al., 2017

Scaffolding student learning

- A timetable provided which detailed taught session as well as indication of out of class activities
  - e.g., reading / group work / seminar, writing café, LD sessions.

- Managed student expectations

- Introduced 'good study' habits

- Dedicated time to group work

- Highlighted social **and** academic events

Turner et al., 2017

Belonging and Academic support

Level of peer interaction with other students

Group	Yes, about right	No, too little	No too much
Block Model **(n=191)**	86.9%	12.0%	1.0%
Standard model **(n=478)**	80.3%	16.3%	3.3%

Expectations of the level of academic support that would be available

Group	Combined high	About right	Combined low
Block Model **(n=188)**	16.0%	62.8%	21.3%
Standard Model **(n=476)**	25.0%	56.3%	18.7%

Turner et al., 2017

Embedding study skills in the discipline

- First immersive module focused on "what it is to be a…"

Different approaches to convey this:

- **Health Programme** - study skills removed from disciplinary context; students struggled to connect with practice, even when followed up by seminars.

- **Business Programme** - study skills integral to the T&L activities and end of module assessment, highly successful.
  - But students struggled to pin-point where or how they had developed these skills

Turner et al., 2017

Expected T&L approaches

- Combination of approaches:
  - Workshop with lecturer and student-led activities
  - Traditional lecture format followed by a small group seminar

- Willingness to engage?
  - Mismatch in expectations of what HE learning is about
    - Lectures / passive engagement
    - Focus on independent learning

  - Need to support students to learn in this way / outline rationale

Turner et al., 2017

Expected module format / T&L methods used

- Combination of approaches:
  - Workshop with lecturer and student-led activities
  - Traditional lecture format followed by a small group seminar
- Willingness to engage?
  - Mismatch in expectations of what HE learning is about
    - Lectures / passive engagement
    - Focus on independent learning
  - Need to support students to learn in this way / outline rationale

Group	Very accurate	Quite Accurate	Quite Inaccurate	Very Inaccurate
Block Model (n=188)	8.5%	64.4%	23.4%	3.7%
Standard model (n=468)	14.1%	68.2%	15.0%	2.8%

Inclusive Assessment

Both modules used the assessment to **'scaffold'** student learning; Assessments introduced early on and **guided learning**

- Range of assessments e.g., group work, reflective essays, portfolios
- Regular opportunities for formative feedback (tutor / peers)

Managed anxiety:

"Working in groups enabled us to discuss our worries about the assessment"

(Business Programme FG)

But – need to ensure they can transfer practice to other modules; connects to the need to development students' academic literacies

Experiences of Assessment

Have you submitted any work for assessment?

Year	Yes	No
2014-15	61.8%	38.2%
2015-16	**91.4%**	8.6%
	+29.6%	-29.6%

If you have had any work marked, was the feedback helpful?

Year	Yes	Mixed Feelings	No
2014-15	57.8%	31.2%	11.0%
2015-16	**67.9%**	24.2%	7.9%
	+10.1%	-7.0%	-3.1%

Student attainment & delivery format

- Mean immersive module marks:
  - IM1 – 67.0%
  - IM2 – 64.7%

- Mean traditional module mark:
  - T1 – 63.5%
  - T2 – 61.7%

  - Main effects for gender, age and entry tariff
  - Nationality – UK students performed better than non-UK, but interaction between delivery format was not significant
  - No main effect for social class or disability

Turner et al., (2021)

Concluding comments

- IM format promoted peer networking & relationships with academic staff
- Student performance in IM format was higher than in traditionally delivered modules for the same semester
- Proposed it allowed students to 'better organize' their time / workload, promote better study habits
- Value of the 'mixed model'
- Integration of study skills challenging and requires careful framing
- Need to manage / discuss student expectations of HE-level study, ways they will learn and support for their learning
- Prepare for a 'second' transition

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