

'A fish in water' - Supporting transition to Higher Education and Initial Teacher Training

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the findings of a study designed to prepare students, from a range of disciplines, to study for Initial Teacher Training (ITT) in Higher Education (HE) for the first time. The paper draws upon data from open ended questionnaires with students, interviews with tutors and also on relevant secondary sources to demonstrate the importance of making use of pre-entry communication with students to support their transition. The notion of habitus can serve as a useful mechanism for understanding issues associated with transition. Bourdieu notes that when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it finds itself 'as a fish in water'. Reversing Bourdieu's analogy, in their initial encounter with HE, some students may feel like a fish out of water. This study involved pre-entry students engaging in a module designed to allow them to begin to experience the new context, both academic and school, in which they would be immersed. It offered the opportunity for them to engage in academic assessment tasks and school based tasks to prepare

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them for the demands of the first year of their HE ITT degree Programme. The paper concludes that students undertook the module for specific personal and professional reasons and that engagement in the module impacted upon both their academic and school based learning. It raises the importance of students having access, in this case, to both the academic and professional habitus of their chosen degree programme and the paper is of relevance to all providers of HE and ITT.

Key words: transition, higher education, induction, preparedness

Introduction

The issue of student retention and attrition has received considerable thought both nationally (Yorke & Thomas 2003; Thomas 2002; Yorke 1999) and internationally (Krause, Hartley, James & McInnis, 2005; Pitkethly & Prosser 2001; Tinto 1993). Pitkethly and Prosser (2001) note that approximately one third of all university students consider withdrawing from their studies in their first year, with Tinto (1993) also noting that first-year students in HE are the group at greatest risk of attrition because for many students making the transition from school to university can be a challenge. The experiences of many first year undergraduate students are hindered by lack of familiarisation (Cook & Leckey, 1999; Clark & Ramsey, 1990). Baxter, Hatt and Tate (2007) note that the onus is very much on students themselves, with regard to them undertaking their own research about institutions, subjects and courses, and receiving insufficient help in making critical decisions. Such concerns endorse those of Krause et al (2005) who report that approximately 30 per cent of students involved in their study who had progressed to HE had felt ill-prepared to choose a university course on leaving school.

This paper frames the issue of transition to HE within Bourdieu's philosophical concept of habitus. Bourdieu uses the term habitus to refer to the norms and practices of particular social classes or groups (Bourdieu, 1992; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Habitus, explains Deer (2003), refers to the types of social practice and behaviour one inherits during various stages of socialisation. It is strongly shaped by experiences and the dispositions one acquires determine how one acts in the world, either with a degree of comfort or discomfort. Whilst dispositions can and do reproduce existing behaviours,

they also have the capacity to generate new behaviours and responses. In this experience-formed and experience-forming locus (Green, 2007) the habitus is a generative rather than fixed system and its generative potential is particularly evident as people experience new social contexts such as school, and, in the context of this paper, HE.

With regard to HE, the notion of institutional habitus seems to be a useful device. Drawing on the work of Reay, David and Ball (2001), Thomas (2002) notes that the values and practices of a HE institution impact on student retention or withdrawal and she explores this through the concept of “institutional habitus”. For example, if students feel that they ‘do not fit in’ they may be more inclined to withdraw early. This can be contrasted to the student whose social and cultural practices are ‘appropriate’ and whose tacit knowledge is valued and who “encounters a social world of which it is a product, it is like a ‘fish in water’’: it does not feel the weight of the water and it takes the world about itself for granted.” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 127) By contrast, the former students may therefore feel like ‘a fish out of water’. Rowley, Hartley and Larkin (2008) suggest that a mismatch between student expectations and actual experiences at HE can lead to disengagement with the academic process. In relation to retention, research evidence has also suggested that a number of different factors seem to contribute to the withdrawal of ITT students in particular. These include students having an idealised perception prior to undertaking ITT of the workload of teachers and concerns regarding the behaviour of children. Indeed, Younger, Brindley, Peddar and Haddar (2004) warn about a perceived lack of recognition among some ITT students of the complexities involved in learning to teach. It is therefore necessary, as asserted by Thomas (2002) to develop, explore and understand different institutional practices that impact on the extent to which students feel that they are accepted.

Literature Review

Induction

A large volume of research spanning the past few decades supports the belief that good practice in relation to induction facilitates both academic and social integration (Turner &

Thompson, 1993; Carter et al. 2003). A cross-sectional synopsis of this research demonstrates that induction programmes vary in their scope, but most universities provide students with information about facilities, services and the courses in which they are enrolled.

Cook (2006, p.7) argues that there are two different types of induction. The first refers to “those events that occur immediately on the arrival of a new student.” In the UK, such induction to HE frequently occurs in what is commonly known as ‘Freshers’ Week’. This is typically a short period of time at the commencement of a degree programme which facilitates opportunities for first-year students to be involved in sessions designed to help them begin to familiarise themselves with institutional practices, both academic and social.

The second type of induction as identified by Cook (2006, p.7) refers to an extended induction process; “a longer-term assimilation of new students into the ways in which the institution operates, particularly as it relates to its teaching and learning methods.” Whilst Freshers’ week does facilitate an opportunity for social and academic induction, the information presented to students in the first weeks of university is not always provided at the most appropriate time or in the most appropriate manner. For instance, students are introduced in the Freshers’ days, to new systems and protocols at a time when they are already trying to retain a great deal of other information that has already been presented to them. Edward (2003) proposes students being presented with an activity-based induction, designed to familiarise them with the systems, resources and procedures of the university.

This paper examines the significance of ‘preparedness’ with specific reference to academic assessment. The reality of HE is that many programmes are assessed summatively early in the first semester, a decided disadvantage for those not engaging early (Penn-Edwards & Donnison, 2011), and therefore, many students not achieving well at the initial stage give up and ‘drop out’. The importance of addressing assessment pre-entry is supported by research indicating that students who earn good grades during their first term are potentially more likely to persist to graduation (Seymour, 1993). For instance, Roucehe, Baker and Roueche (1984) found that well-designed developmental programs, implemented by carefully selected and well-trained staff, can motivate students to achieve and also to persist with their studies.

Preparedness for School Placement

Research conducted by Hobson and Malderez (2005) ascertained that of those students who withdrew from their ITT programmes, the three main reasons given were: their inability to manage the workload, a change of mind regarding teaching as a career and their non-enjoyment of the school placement. Their study revealed a mismatch between what students expected teaching to be and the reality. These expectations tended to be informed by their memories (arguably rose-tinted) of their own school-days or in some cases by observation in a school, yet the reality was found to be much more demanding and included elements unknown to them. Chambers and Roper (2002) investigated the reasons why Post Graduate student-teachers withdrew from programmes and their study echoed that of Hobson and Malderez (2005), noting that for many students the level of commitment expected of them as teachers was beyond what they were prepared for and/or able to give. The reality of the school based experience highlighted for some students the real demands of the role of a teacher and it was at precisely this time that students found the demands and reality of teaching more than they could cope with. One may argue that if the demands of the reality of teaching exceed expectations, then withdrawal from an ITT programme may be appropriate for some individuals. However, if preparation for entry to programmes allowed for students to experience 'the reality' in advance of committing to a particular programme, then some students may not have to experience the emotional and financial loss associated with withdrawal (HEFCE, 1997).

Context for the research

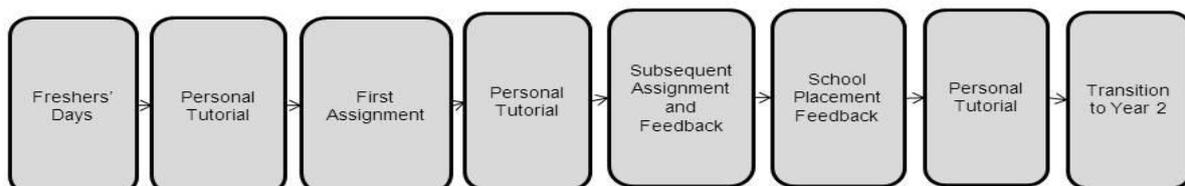
The study which underpins this paper was undertaken in a university in the North West of England. The main participants involved in the study were pre-entry students who subsequently enrolled in a four-year BA (Hons) Primary Education with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) part time Degree Programme. The inclusion of the part time Programme at this university facilitates the opportunity for students who have a wider range of commitments to engage in academic study leading to QTS. The Programme typically recruits approximately 40 trainees per academic year. In the UK, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) tariff is the system for allocating

points to qualifications used for entry to HE. The entry requirement for the Part Time Programme at this institution is 280 points, in line with similar regional Programmes and equivalent to 3 Advanced Level grades of B,B and C.

From our perspective, whilst any student withdrawal from a Programme is undesirable, retention on the Part Time Programme is strong; however there is evidence to suggest that trainees are more likely to withdraw in the early stages. For instance, in the academic year 2009/2010, the retention rate for the Programme was 97%, and of the 6 trainees who withdrew from the Programme, 5 did so at the end of their first year following their first school placement. With this in mind, and in advance of commencing this study we reflected on the key communication points with pre-entry ITT students and those enrolled in Year 1 of an ITT degree programme. It became evident that our main technique for communication was, arguably, very linear in that communications were one-dimensional and chronological, and also that the pre-programme and on-programme communications were essentially separate entities (Figure 1). In line with Baxter, Hatt and Tate (2007), such a model illustrates strong self-reliance on the part of pre-entry students, with the onus being on them to familiarise themselves with a particular university and degree programme.

Figure 1. Linear Model of Key Communication Points

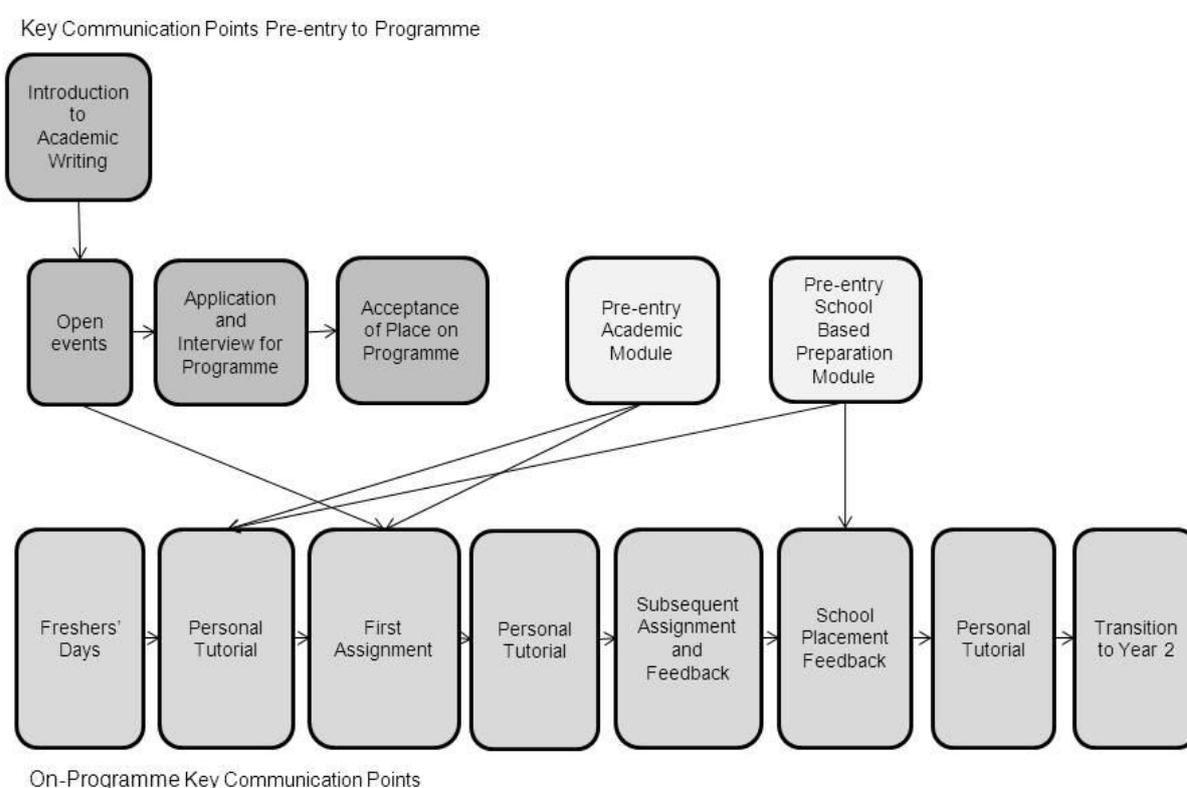
Key Communication Points Pre-entry to Programme



On-Programme Key Communication Points

In such a communication model, engagement in advance of Programme entry was minimal with no specific opportunities to engage students in preparation for either the academic or school-based demands of the Programme. Such lack of preparation did not allow potential students to interrogate or deconstruct the demands of a potential new experience,. In efforts to address such concerns we introduced 'preparation sessions' at our Open Events and following the success of this initiative, as noted by Murtagh (2012), we devised an 'Advanced' communication model (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Advanced Model of Key Communication Points



The advanced communication model reflects the conceptual framework for this paper, highlighting the possibility of preparing students in advance of degree Programme entry with regard to both academic and school-based experiences capitalising on opportunities for them to become involved with the institution before commencing studying at it, such that they begin to develop a an understanding of its wider professional and institutional habitus.

The key communication points of the model are similar to those presented in Figure 1, whereby there are pre-entry communication points, such as open events; and 'on –

programme' communication points, such as Fresher's Days. The main adaptation in this model is the inclusion of 'active' induction activities as recommended by Edward (2003) and involved the implementation of a pre-entry module offered on a voluntary basis to pre-entry students to the BA (Honours) Primary Education with Qualified Teacher Status Part Time degree Programme. The students enrolled in the Part Time Programme are a diverse group of students (see Figures 3 and 4).

Figure 3. Age profiles of the Full and Part Time Trainees

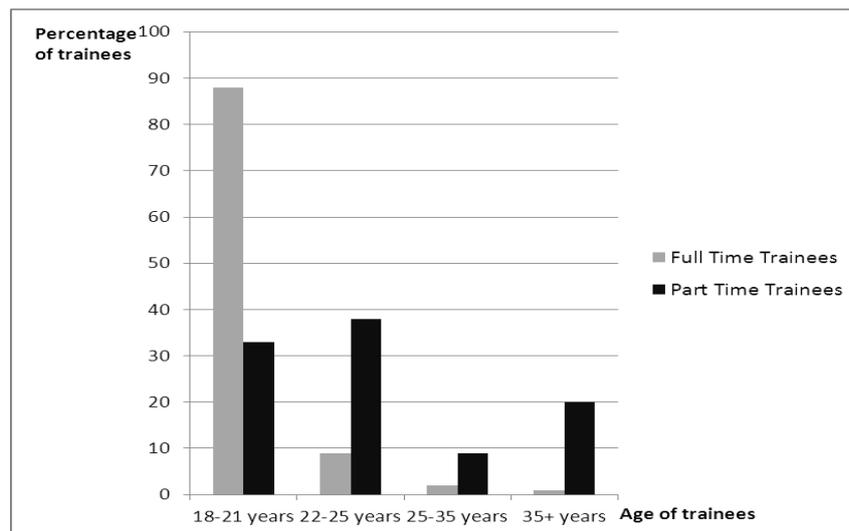
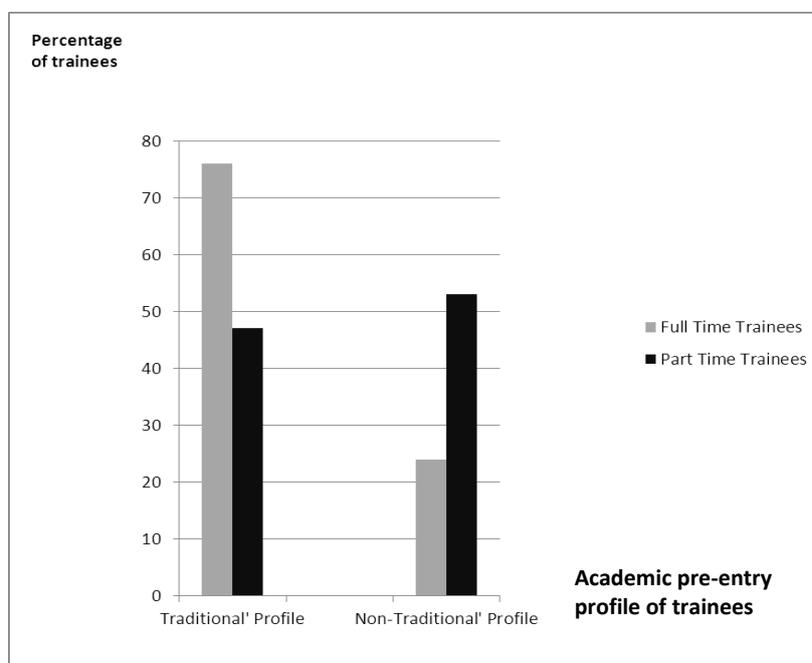


Figure 4. Academic Entry Profile of the Full and Part Time Trainees



As the Figures illustrate, in comparison with the Full Time cohort of students enrolled on the same degree, there is a noticeable difference with regard to pre-entry qualifications and age profile. 76% (n=178) of the Full Time cohort commenced the degree with

'traditional' pre-entry qualifications of 3 Advanced Levels compared with 47% (n=16) of the part time trainees, 53% of whom entered with 'non-traditional' pre-entry qualifications such as Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) Level 3. In addition to there being a clear academic distinction between the cohorts, a significant majority of students enrolled on the Full Time Programme are aged between 18 and 21 (88%) with 1 % being aged 35+. On the Part Time Programme, the age profile is much more diverse with 33% (n= 12) of the cohort being aged 18-21 and 20% (n=7) being aged 35+, and those who undertook the module were representative of the group.

Zepke, Leach and Prebble (2003) state that there are two possible retention practices which education institutions may consider. They categorise these as integration or adaptation discourses. Integration discourse involves integrating the learner into the existing institutional habitus. Adaptation discourse recognises that learners have diverse cultural capital and that institutional processes must adapt them to meet diverse learner needs. Creating an institutional habitus that accounts for all issues is inevitably complex, but we believe that there is scope at our institution to ensure that the prevailing institutional habitus is made clear and visible to pre-entry students.

Research design

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the potential of enhancing the induction practices of a particular HE ITT programme. The aim of enhancing practice was to allow for students to experience 'the reality', in terms of both the academic and school based demands of the programme in advance of them commencing it, given that research in the field notes that if students feel that they 'fit in' then retention is more likely (see Thomas, 2002). In facilitating opportunities for this, it was hoped that pre-entry students would develop a richer comprehension of the Institutions wider professional and institutional habitus.

The study was situated within a qualitative research paradigm and an evaluative case study approach was adopted (Stenhouse, 1985). Evaluative case studies are those

which facilitate 'educational actors' or 'decision makers' with information that will help them to judge the merit and worth of policies, programmes or institutions.

Students were informed of the pre-entry module at the conclusion of their interviews as part of the application process for entry to the degree Programme. The interviews were conducted between March and July. Of the 38 students offered a place on the degree Programme following a successful interview, 8 opted to undertake the voluntary pre-entry module.

Data regarding student perceptions of the pre-entry module were elicited through the use of open questionnaires distributed in November to all of the students. The purpose of gathering data through questionnaires was that it allowed data to be gathered swiftly and also removed the potential of researcher bias, given that the Programme Leader had initiated the pre-entry module. The questions originated from the conceptual framework of the study, which noted the potential, based on literature in the field, for preparing students more readily for encountering a new context such that they did not feel 'like a fish out of water'. The questionnaires were open-ended and qualitative in nature (Johnson and Christensen, 2004) to allow students to reflect on their rationale for undertaking the module, and to tease out their perceptions with regard to any potential impact the module may have had, or not had, on their experiences to date. Further data were gathered through scrutiny of assessment feedback from those enrolled in the pre-entry module and subsequent assessments conducted when students had enrolled in the degree programme. Personal tutors, who worked with the trainees during professional supported the students during their school based experiences were also interviewed to elicit their perceptions regarding the pre-entry module. The interviews were informal in nature (Johnson & Christensen, 2004), and conducted following the school experiences. The rationale for conducting such interviews was that they could be facilitated quickly following a school experience de-briefing session undertaken as part of standard practice. Students and their tutors were informed of the research by a formal letter and in line with the BERA ethical guidelines, were advised that their participation in the research was optional and that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

Data were analysed through drawing on the conceptual framework of the study (see figure 2), which highlights the possibility of preparing students in advance of degree Programme entry with regard to both academic and school-based experiences.

The basic framework for coding was, therefore, to interrogate the data with regard to academic experiences associated with undertaking the pre-entry module and also with school-based experiences.

Findings

The findings of the data are presented below and, drawing on the conceptual framework, are centred around academic and professional experiences. The findings are structured to present not only the experiences associated with the concepts, but also any outcomes.

Academic reasons for undertaking the pre-entry module

Three of the students commenced the module due to having been absent from study and were anxious that their absence would impact on their ability to engage fully within an unfamiliar context. The module offered the opportunity for students to re-engage with academic study in advance of commencing the degree Programme. For instance, Nat stated:

I have been out of education for a number of years and felt this would be an introduction to my future teaching course and aid my future studies. In completing the module, I knew it would provide a platform to build and develop my personal learning. I wanted to make sure that I was fully aware of what I was signing up for so I would fit in, especially being older than the others! (Questionnaire Response from Nat)

For these students, the module served the purpose of not only preparing them for the academic expectations of the programme, but also for building confidence:

Doing the module has built my confidence. I feel I can now do an assignment with confidence, knowing that I can do it and knowing what the expectations are (Questionnaire Response from Nat).

My interest was stimulated into doing the module to gain experience in completing a Higher Education assignment, due to being away from HE for 18 years, and also to give me some experience of a Primary School environment. I felt that this would help me fit in better... I wanted to know what it was all about - it's been such a long time since I was studying and I

*was worried at first that I wouldn't know where to start and be out of my depth.
(Questionnaire Response from Keith).*

In a similar vein, the students who entered the Programme with non-traditional qualifications commented very specifically about their choice to undertake the module to prepare them for the academic demands of a degree Programme which they anticipated would be very different from their prior experiences.

It gave me a better understanding of the kind of tasks required as a teacher and how to write academically, and this was something I was worried about. Writing academically is something that does not come naturally to me. (Questionnaire Response from Carl)

*I have lots of experience as a TA (Teaching Assistant), but find the academic parts difficult. I wasn't really sure if I would be able to do the degree, I knew it would be harder. Doing the module has helped me to understand what I need to do to pass the assignments
(Questionnaire Response from Hope).*

One student noted that she had embarked upon the module so that she could gain an understanding of how to manage her workload as part of the programme. Holly is a 21 year old student, who entered the Programme with 300 UCAS points, exceeding the programme entry requirement of 280 points, and having completed the first year of a degree in law at a different North West Institution. Holly stated that she decided to withdraw from her law degree Programme due to anxiety related to its academic aspects and decided to commence the pre-entry module to allow her to gain an understanding of workload demands whilst studying Part Time and working as a Part Time Teaching Assistant concurrently

I wanted to complete the module to know and understand what would be expected of me as a university student at this university. The module helped me enormously prior to starting my degree in Primary education. It helped me to understand and cope with the workload before starting at this university. This gave me a clear understanding of the expectations that come with undertaking a degree part time. (Questionnaire Response from Holly)

Academic outcomes of undertaking the pre-entry module

Staff were mindful of the potential for students to perhaps feel demotivated on receipt of a 'low' mark for the assessment of the pre-entry module. To mitigate this, personal tutorials were held with individuals to support them in understanding their feedback and in addressing targets. To ensure that students could access this support, the tutorials were scheduled in advance and formed a part of the 'typical' personal tutorial expectations of the degree programme, but with an additional specific focus on academic support and advice.

Keith was a mature student, aged 40, who entered the Programme with a Higher National Diploma (HND) in Business work and Finance and a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 3 work based award in Social Work. At interview for entry to the BA (Honours) Primary Education with QTS Part Time programme, Keith was identified as having good academic and teaching potential. At interview, whilst he was able to draw on his work experiences, he received feedback following the interview which suggested that he would benefit from gaining further experience in mainstream Primary Schools and that he research current developments in Primary Education. Keith took the opportunity to enrol in the pre-entry module and in September he submitted his assignment which was a 1000 word piece in response to the following:

In light of the understanding you have gained through reading the articles provided, make an analysis of your own learning, supported by theories you have been introduced to.

The work was marked in line with Level 4 QAA grading criteria and detailed feedback and targets were set for Keith. His overall mark for the module was 40% - this is a 3rd class mark. Some of the feedback offered was as follows:

The account of your learning demonstrates that you are beginning to self-analyse and have an understanding of your needs as a learner. ...you need to develop your skills in synthesizing literature into the text. The University uses the Harvard Reference system for referring to academic reading in essays.

Keith was given three specific areas for development and further comments.

1. Analyse your observations/discussions more deeply to draw conclusions.
2. Incorporate literature more fully in assignments

Keith submitted his first assessed piece of work as part of the degree Programme in November. The assignment brief was as follows:

You will write an assignment which demonstrates your growing understanding of, and reflections upon, how a particular aspect of a school's work impacts upon the following areas:

- **The diversity of pupils' backgrounds**
- **The importance of equality of educational opportunity**
- **Challenging stereotypical views**
- **The inclusive learning environment**

This was marked in line with Level 4 grading criteria and Keith achieved a mark of 67% (2i classification for the work). The feedback that relates to this assignment for Keith was as follows:

This assignment clearly demonstrates your understanding of diversity and stereotyping in schools and how schools seek to manage these challenges.

You make good use of reference to the National Curriculum and also to current legislation which helps to place the discussion in the relevant context.

The assignment is very well structured – there is clear evidence that you have planned very effectively and this is a skill which will stand you in good stead for future pieces of work.

You have begun to consider some alternative view points and this extends your discussion but also adds depth.

This is a very good piece of work which shows clear potential for a higher grade.

The example above demonstrates that through undertaking the module, students received detailed formative feedback and developmental targets which served to impact positively on future academic achievement. Notably 7 of the 8 students who undertook the module received an increased mark for their first Programme assignment, (whilst the remaining student gained the same mark for both pieces of work), and in particular, there was a marked increase for the 2 students who attained marks in the 40s for the

module with Keith moving from 45-67% and Hope moving from 40-56%. Indeed, Hope stated that the feedback she received from the module tutor was of particular benefit:

I feel that my portfolio aided my initial development within my studies. It gave an introduction to the degree and provided a springboard that I could develop. The portfolio also helped to enhance my assignment writing skills and the feedback I was given was extremely beneficial for my assignment writing within my course (Questionnaire Response from Hope)

A further dimension of the module was that it allowed students to experience receiving feedback on their academic submission. Three of the students commented that this was of use, as they now knew what to expect from tutors. For some students this was of particular use given their prior experiences:

Getting the feedback was useful as I know what will happen next time. We used to be able to hand in drafts... get feedback, sometimes 5 or 6 times...that doesn't happen here.(Questionnaire Response from Carl)

At the conclusion of Level 4, the students who undertook the module all concluded with an Average Percentage Mark for the Level that was higher than their pre-entry module mark. Notably, the two students who had received marks in the 40% range for the pre-entry module completed Level 4 each with an average percentage mark of 57% (Keith and Hope), thus demonstrating the sustained impact of the feedback on their overall achievement. The tutors were asked to comment about the perceived effectiveness of the module with regard to academic achievement. Of interest, a key message from the personal tutors related to 'knowing the students'. Tutors stated that having had the opportunity to read examples of students' academic work in advance of them commencing the programme, they were more prepared for the first personal tutorial, having a clear basis for discussion related to academic progress. This allowed, Tutor A stated

A clear focus on the individual student. Having seen 'where they are at' meant that I had a clear knowledge and understanding of trainees' starting points.(Tutor A)

As a result, the tutors felt that relationships with those who had undertaken the module were forged quickly as there was immediately common ground on which to build their tutor-student relationship.

Professional Reasons for undertaking the module

Whilst those who undertook the Programme considered it to be beneficial from an academic perspective, they all noted that they had wanted to undertake the pre-entry module to prepare them for the teaching placements associated with the Programme. In addition to submitting a pre-entry assignment, the module asked that students spend a minimum of 6 days in a primary school setting, undertaking specific tasks to develop their understanding of teaching and learning. Evidence of having undertaken this activity was submitted in September in the form of a portfolio. Keith stated:

I was motivated into doing the tasks as they helped to promote my understanding of the pupils' experience of life in a Primary school and gave me an insight into the roles and responsibilities of various staff members involved in the day to day running of a Primary school. I engaged with the tasks by observing what went on throughout the school during the whole school day, discussed the various issues involved with staff and took notes accordingly. I then read the relevant literature provided and wrote up what I felt was required for the specified tasks. The portfolio document allowed me to gain some insight into various staff roles, myself as a potential teacher and some of the ways in which things are organised within a Primary school. (Questionnaire Response from Keith)

Having submitted the portfolio to his personal tutor, Keith received the following feedback:

You have completed the [portfolio] tasks in this section to a satisfactory standard. You have, through observation in a setting, demonstrated a developing understanding of primary schools, although have missed some opportunities for enriched analysis. How does the management and organisation of the school impact on teaching and learning?

Develop understanding of planning and assessment – refer to Clarke (2001) to help with assessment

The pre-entry experiences of the group were diverse; for example, three members of the group were employed in schools as Teaching Assistants, two were involved in social

care, and one student had recently completed A Levels and a short period of time in a school in an observational capacity. However, irrespective of experiences, all of the students perceived a key advantage of the module was that it allowed them to gain an enhanced experience in a school.

Carl, stated:

I wanted to do the module to give me some experience in a school and to see what kind of work would be required on the course.

And Nat stated:

I wanted a 'practice run' at writing to explore further into how a school is managed on a day to day basis. I wanted to know more about what I was going to be studying. I knew that everything I found out would help me while I was training to become a teacher. Before starting University I was already working in a school as a Teaching Assistant. This was very beneficial to me as I could complete the module using my experiences so far.

Professional outcomes of undertaking the module

All 8 trainees were formally registered on the BA (Hons) primary Education with QTS Degree Programme in October and undertook a formally assessed school placement in May, which they all successfully passed and Keith's tutor stated:

Keith has developed a good relationship with the children. He is aware of the contribution made by each member of staff to the well-being of the school as a whole...Keith is continuing to develop his use of behaviour management strategies in order to maintain control in the lesson. Keith understands the importance of planning situations which stimulate, challenge and support learning and the abilities of the children.

Clear targets were set that enabled Keith to develop his understanding of primary schools. The assessment above was conducted as part of Keith's first school placement as part of the degree Programme. Undertaking the pre-entry module allowed Keith the opportunity, in advance of a formally assessed placement, to begin to develop his understanding of teaching and learning and also of the importance of maintaining detailed school files. Keith thought:

Completing the module definitely helped my own personal development with regards to the process of academic writing. It enabled me to gain valuable experience within a Primary school setting and gave me a taster into looking into the specific roles and responsibilities that various staff members have. The feedback that I received following the assignment put me on a good footing towards the essays that I have had to write since starting the course proper. (Questionnaire Response from Keith)

Whilst all students successfully passed the initial placement and remain on Programme to date, it is worth noting, that it was difficult to establish a clear link between engagement with the pre-entry module and individual attainment for the placement. Nevertheless, the personal tutors commented that, through engaging with the module, students were typically more aware of the requirement to maintain detailed school based files. Tutors also felt well-placed to support students in setting school based targets given that they had already had opportunities to engage with them via the module feedback.

Reasons for not undertaking the module

Analysis of the open questionnaires presented evidence of why 30 of the cohort had not elected to complete the pre-entry module. The following reasons were cited by respondents:

- Unaware of the module
- Unable to commit to the module and school placement aspect due to work commitments
- Insufficient time to complete the module due to late offer for entry to the programme

Whilst several students stated that they were unaware of the existence of the module, it is worth noting that all applicants were given information about this at interview and received follow-up information about this when they received their formal written offer for entry to the BA (honours) degree Programme. It is possible that the wealth of information presented to candidates during this period overshadowed information related to the module and this is an aspect for further consideration. Indeed the 'timeliness' of the module is perhaps something that could be considered further. For instance, several students stated that work commitments impacted upon their ability to

do this before commencing the degree Programme, and similarly, 2 candidates had insufficient time to complete the activities due to late entry to the Programme.

Discussion

There is evidence in this study to illustrate that the induction process can be enhanced, through capitalising on pre-entry communication points (Figure 2) and introducing an activity based pre-entry module designed to prepare students for the expectations of their chosen degree programme. By introducing such a module, opportunities can be afforded for pre-HE students to begin to develop a transparent understanding of the academic and professional habitus of their chosen degree (Reay , David & Ball, 2001 and Younger et al. 2004).

For some students returning from an absence there was anxiety about resuming study and coping with its challenges. Facilitating opportunities for these students to engage in academic writing allowed for a smoother transition to degree level study. Through undertaking the module, the students' awareness of the academic demands of the programme was clearer and arguably on commencing the degree Programme they did not feel 'like a fish out of water', but had acquired some notion of the institutional habitus into which they became immersed when starting the degree (Bourdieu, 1992; Reay et al. 2001). Such an acquisition was particularly notable for the students whose module submission was awarded a mark in the 40s band, and their academic profile across the Level indicates a sustained academic achievement averaging 57%. Such a finding is of interest, as it indicates how students can draw on the experiences provided and make effective use of feedback to commence the Programme with a secure academic profile. The importance of addressing assessment proactively in pre-programme induction is supported by Seymour (1993) who asserts that students who earn good grades during their first term are far more likely to continue to graduation. We would hope that in helping students to secure these good grades in the early stages of their degree programme that they will continue through the remainder of the rest of the degree successfully, because when first-year students improve their academic performance, their retention rate tends to also improve (Roueche, Baker & Roueche, 1984). Therefore, in seeking to provide students with the skills to approach assessment

competently and thus improve retention across a degree Programme, consideration needs to be given to the transparency of assessment processes at the pre-Programme stage.

In addition, the feedback from the school placement report forms indicated that the students had begun to target areas for development as outlined in their written feedback and were arguably well-placed for commencing their first assessed placement as part of the Programme. Given that the research in the field (Hobson & Malderez, 2005 and Chambers & Roper 2002) highlights the importance of students experiencing the reality of the complexities of teaching and learning, this module allowed for potential students to assess their commitment to teaching against its reality before undertaking the first school based placement.

It is important to note, however, that although the study made use of a variety of rich and relevant data, it came at a cost. One, for instance, is generalisability given the scale of the study. The approach illustrates what happened in one particular context, but not necessarily what will or must happen. In addition, the project placed additional demands on staff, with them undertaking additional marking to support the initiative. Whilst this was manageable on a small scale, consideration would need to be given as to how this could be sustained on a wider scale.

Whilst this study is still in its early stages, we feel that we have made good progress in terms of providing students with a clearer understanding of the teaching, learning and assessment expectations within our particular institution. It is, however, important to acknowledge that we cannot identify what we may have prevented here given that all of the students who commenced the programme remain enrolled. Nevertheless, the use of an advanced communication model to facilitate pre-entry engagement with academic and school based activities has served to assist pre-entry students in embarking upon their journey to ITT in HE with clarity and with clear targets for development such that the stepping stone to HE ITT is manageable and based on transparent and tangible real experiences. There is however, scope for us to continue to develop our induction activities further.

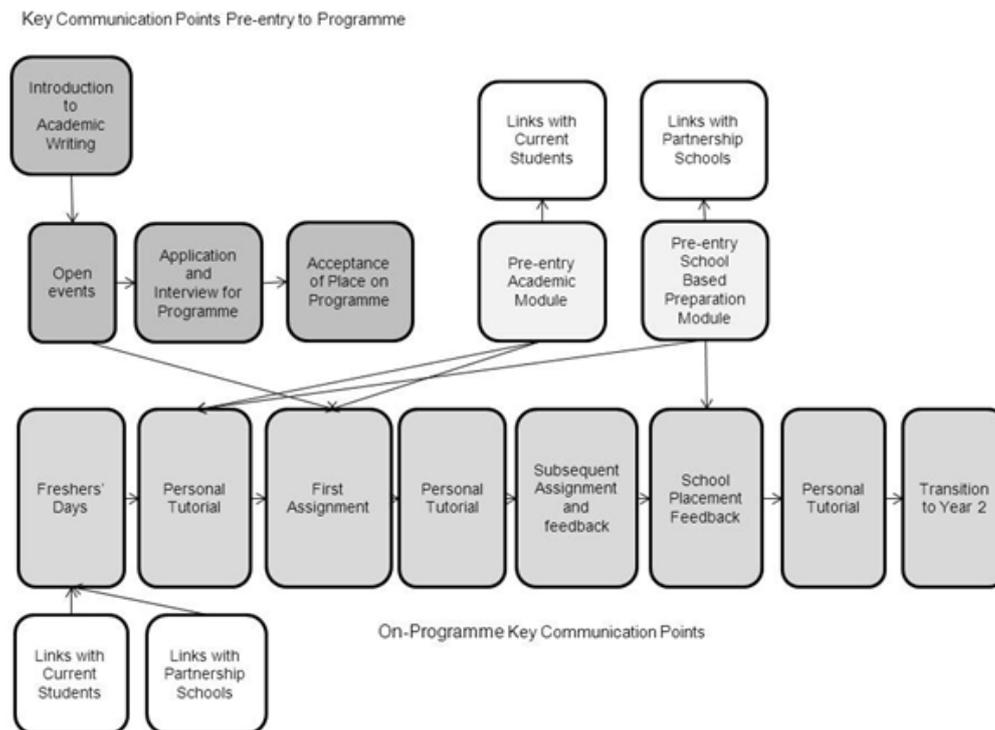
Conclusion

Whilst the module allowed some pre-HE students the opportunity to undertake typical school based activities and assessments, there is scope for further development of this. In the first instance, the timeliness of the module needs to be considered to allow for those with additional commitments the opportunity to engage should they wish. The module was open to students from June and work was submitted in mid-September on a voluntary basis, and arguably those students who were unable to participate voluntarily missed out on a valuable opportunity. The submission date for this could be extended to mid October as this would allow for more students to enter schools in September, whilst still receiving timely feedback on the submission to prepare for the first degree programme assignment. In addition, there needs to be clarity of expectations of the module and whilst it is, from a pragmatic perspective, useful to give information at interview, there is scope for further literature about the module to be given to the students after the interview to ensure that they are aware of its demands.

There are further opportunities for enriching pre-entry activity, centred around developing aspects of links with schools in which students undertake the module and the potential for this to lead directly into the first assessed placement of the degree Programme. And similarly, opportunities for developing links with our current student body (Figure 3).

Figure 3, the 'refined' model, demonstrates the potential for capitalising on opportunities for pre-entry students to forge links with our partner schools and current students such that they can become more widely involved with the institution and develop a richer comprehension of its wider professional and institutional habitus.

Figure 3. The Refined Model of Key Communication Points



In addition, whilst the initiative has been a positive introduction to the academic and profession habitus of the chosen degree Programme, there is debate to be had about the nature of study and assessment in HE. For instance, we are investing time inculcating our potential students into 'how we do things here', when arguably we could be reflecting on our practice – if the experience at HE is so different to prior experiences should we not also be investigating how our Programmes can diversify to meet the needs of our varied range of students rather than adding additional modules to support students with the transition?

We acknowledge that such an additional, pre-entry module is not in itself the answer to ensuring successful transition and thus retention in HE, and indeed is fairly labour intensive, however, we do believe that it is a step in the right direction to ensuring that induction is meaningful, appropriate and allows for those aspiring to HE ITT to be well prepared for the realities of both the academic and school based demands of such a degree Programme.

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