**Social Dimensions in European Higher Education Conference Abstract**

25-27 February 2015, University of Vienna

**Reports on actions undertaken to foster the social situation of students**

Related to these Conference Themes

* Socio-economic background
* Underrepresented groups
* Retention and success
* Non-traditional students
* Access
* Continuation of studies

**Title: Widening access through transition from College to University**

In Scotland, one strategy for increasing participation at university for people from deprived socio-economic areas is to provide academic pathways from vocational courses at college to university. Using the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, college students can use their vocational qualifications to enter into the second or third year of a four year degree. A government initiative (Scottish Funding Council, 2013) has created a five year programme to give additional funding to universities to enhance the experience of college students on this route. During 2013/14, the School of Computing’s Associate Student Project at Edinburgh Napier University, UK, introduced a range of partnership and bridging initiatives to link college and university experience for associate students studying Computing in partner colleges. The work is underpinned by a research project, enabling previous research to be drawn on and evaluating the outcomes of this project to inform work across the university and beyond.

College entrants to year 2 or 3 of university programmes face a number of challenges. Whereas it is recognised that year 1 of university study provides an induction programme, college entrants in the second and third year have previously been required to make a comparable transition with little support. Under the Associate Student project, additional academic support is offered to students at the college during their first two years of study. Perhaps as importantly, they are given opportunities to visit the university, meet staff and students and to attend lectures. College staff are offered support with their teaching and a curriculum working party has identified areas where additional materials need to be developed to support articulation.

Research indicates that college entrants are less likely to take an active part in class, less likely to feel part of the academic community and less likely to get involved in student representation (Higher Education Academy, National Union of Students, 2013) (Ingram & Gallacher, 2013). Initial research by the Edinburgh Napier University Computing team (Meharg & Fotheringham, 2013) argued that giving college students the status of Associate Student of the university did not, in itself, support students to become more effective learners. Focus groups with articulating students suggested that social integration could improve retention and academic performance. A large scale survey of students in the School of Computing has examined differing attitudes and approaches between college students and continuing students at the university. Findings from these investigations has led to the development of new interventions addressing social relationships (Tinto, 1997 & Crisp, 2010), increasing the role of peer support for college to university transition, in addition to academic support. These measures are designed to increase social integration and give a voice to a group of students who have sometimes been considered invisible (Christe, Barron, & D'Annunzio-Green, 2011).

The paper will discuss the extent to which articulating from college to university creates an educational pathway that is a genuine opportunity for degree achievement. It will also examine the effectiveness of a range of strategies for removing barriers and providing additional support for students on this route.

Debbie Meharg and Jenny Tizard

Edinburgh Napier University

# References

Christe, H., Barron, P., & D'Annunzio-Green, N. (2011). Direct Entrants in Transition: becoming independent learners. *Studies in Higher Education, 38*(4), 623-637.

Higher Education Academy, National Union of Students. (2013). *Learning Journeys for All.* Edinburgh: Higher Education Academy.

Ingram, R., & Gallacher, J. (2013). *Making the Transition from College to University.* Glasgow: Glasgow Caledonian University.

Meharg, D., & Fotheringham, J. (2013). Partnership and Preparation: A new model of transition from college to university.

Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership . (2014). *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework/ The Framework*. Retrieved from Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Website: http://scqf.org.uk/

Scottish Funding Council. (2013). *Additional articulation places for partnership between colleges and universities.* Edinburgh.