

Forum Insights

REPORT OF RESEARCH PROJECT 6

Transition from Second Level and Further Education to Higher Education

This Forum Insight summarises the key aspects of a project which investigated students' experiences of the transition to higher education. It will be of interest to teachers, managers and students.

Introduction

As part of Forum's commitment to leading and facilitating evidence-based enhancement, it has funded a series of *Focused Research Projects* which were conducted over a six month period by higher education researchers in partnership with the National Forum. The projects were designed to provide a quick snapshot of the key issues and findings on a number of nationally important themes. Eight successful projects were awarded funding by the Forum following competitive selection, based on international peer review in December 2014. Ethics approval for the projects was granted through the higher education institutions involved and the National Forum's Research Ethics Committee.

Overall this work has started to create a body of targeted knowledge that can be used quickly to guide future practices in teaching and learning. It also shows institutions working together and in partnership with the Forum to use research to improve approaches to the learning experience.

Transition from Second Level and Further Education to Higher Education

This project is a case study of the experiences of students in the transition to higher education drawn from four higher education institutions, Trinity College Dublin, Limerick Institute of Technology, Mary Immaculate College and University of Limerick. The aims of the project were to review the ways in which students are best prepared to participate successfully in higher education and to make the transition from second and further education to a higher education learning context. The study involved a high level review of the literature relating to transitions internationally, as well as literature specific to the Irish higher education context. A survey of students was undertaken, which generated 1,579 responses and ten focus groups were conducted across the four institutions (pp19-23).

What are the key findings?

- International research on transitions to higher education highlights a range of factors including: time management demands; levels of student engagement in learning and with the higher education institution; social integration; participation in active learning such as groupwork and formation of critical thinking skills prior to entry.

- Irish research to date has illustrated issues such as poor conceptions of the workload demands; lack of social interaction between students in large classes; disengagement of students and institutional responsiveness; clarity about learning goals and social aspects of college life (pp15-18)
- From the student survey responses, students reported managing time and submitting assessments on time as the most challenging, followed by the challenges of writing assignments.
- Responses to an open-ended survey question on other challenges of transition were grouped thematically as: increased personal responsibility; social personal challenges; logistical challenges; academic challenges; large classes and communications.
- More detailed analysis of the survey responses focuses on factors exacerbating transition; impacts on academic performance and skills required to cope with transitions. (pp25-35)
- Focus groups allowed for the exploration of students' suggestions on approaches which would support transitions, these included: higher education supports for academic skills and social integration; academic skills preparation at secondary school; managing expectations and engagement in higher education and general skills preparation (pp. 37 – 54)

What are the implications of these findings?

- The experience of transition to higher education for students can take some time with attendant consequences for academic performance.
- The depth of the students' suggestions for those experiences and supports which they perceive would facilitate a better transition are worthy of further consideration by higher education institutions, as well as policy groups engaged in developing approaches on transitions at national level.
- Students also acknowledged successful measures already in place and recommended that these be extended (pp57-59)

Further Information

For further information on this project, including a copy of the full report and bibliography please see: <http://www.teachingandlearning.ie/t-l-scholarship/national-forum-research-projects/>



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