Final Report 2012

Enhancing the student experience: transition from vocational education and training to higher education

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Executive Summary

The project ‘Enhancing the student experience: transition from Vocational Education and Training (VET) to Higher Education’ was funded by the Australian and Learning Council (ALTC) in 2009 with the University of Western Sydney as the lead institution and Charles Sturt University as a partner. The purpose of the project was to investigate the transition experiences of students entering higher education on the basis of a VET qualification and to develop strategies that would facilitate the smooth transition of these students in the first year of study.

The two partner institutions selected disciplinary cohorts for the study on the basis of proportions of articulating VET students. UWS investigated the experiences of students in Business and Law, Early Childhood, and Nursing, while CSU concentrated on students undertaking studies in Education.

Key findings suggested that overall students valued the challenge of embracing a new university culture including adapting to different learning orientations and establishing new study and social networks. Despite this, the first year of study and in particular, the first months seemed to be a period in which many students experienced high levels of stress. At UWS 59.5 percent of students found the amount of study to be more than they had expected. In a similar vein, 50 percent of students nominated ‘balancing demands of study and work’ as either difficult at first, difficult or very difficult. Other areas that presented a degree of difficulty to students were registering for tutorials, assessment tasks, academic writing, academic conventions and coping with the online environment. Students nominated the need for prior knowledge about the expectations of university study and the availability of information about support services, such as bridging programs, as significant factors that could improve transition experiences.

In response to these findings the project team implemented a number of strategies. These included information resources such as a welcome pack for VET students and a targeted web page both of which deal with commonly asked questions, explain similarities and differences between the VET and higher education sectors and inform students about the availability about services such as preparation programs, the Peer Assisted Study Session Program and other support services. Events such as the pre-offer ‘Academic Preparation Seminars’ provided course specific information related to expectations and general information about university enabling programs and support services. These sessions were found by students to be worthwhile and informative. In 2011 students from VET backgrounds attended the Unistep enabling programs in academic literacies and mathematics and the Educational Technology Preparation Program at almost double the rate that they are represented in the university-wide population.
List of Acronyms

- ALTC - Australian Learning and Teaching Council
- UWS – University of Western Sydney
- COAG – Council of Australian Governments
- CSU – Charles Sturt University
- VET – Vocational Education and Training
- HE – Higher Education
- AVETRA – Australian Vocational Education & Training Research Association
- HERDSA – Higher Education Research Development Society of Australasia
- MCEETYA – Ministerial Council of Education, Employment and Training and Youth Affairs
- AALL – Association for Academic Literacy and Language
- RM – Relationships Manager
- AQF – Australian Qualifications Framework
- TAS – Technical and Applied Studies
- TAFE – Technical and Further Education

Acknowledgments

Many people have contributed their time, enthusiasm and expertise to this project. We acknowledge their invaluable contribution.

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- Dr Michelle Sanson, School of Law, UWS
- Dr Maureen Morris, Student Learning Unit, UWS
Outcomes and Impact of Project

Rationale
With the continuing increase of students articulating from vocational education training (VET) into universities, the support for the student transition experience has become an issue of emerging and continuing national importance.

UWS has a large percentage, up to 24%, of its undergraduate student intake articulating directly from the VET sector to further their studies in a wide range of disciplines at university. In recognising and supporting these alternative entry paths UWS has made a concerted effort to effectively manage this cohort as part of its commitment to lifelong learning in Western Sydney.

This strategy directly supports the MCEETYA Good Practice Principles for Credit Transfer and Articulation from VET to Higher Education (2005) which reports that “A key priority for Australian, State and Territory governments is to make it easier for Australians to enter higher education from a diversity of backgrounds and experiences, including those students transferring from VET to Higher Education. A further push for this policy has come from COAG (Council of Australian Governments, 2006) who have noted the shortage of skilled workers and the need to ensure that workers have the requisite skills and qualifications.

Outcomes
The project was conducted over 2.5 years consisting of three phases as proposed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 1</th>
<th>Investigating students’ transitional experience into Higher Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A review of current literature related to VET transition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student survey. Participants will be recruited via email to complete an online survey form.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student focus groups will be used to further validate findings from the student survey data. It is envisaged that the focus groups will provide more detailed information about specific needs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 2</th>
<th>The development of strategies to enhance the support for VET transitional students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developing a framework for strategic support to address the gaps identified in phase one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The piloting of selected strategic approaches relevant to a particular Unit of Study or cohort of students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 3</th>
<th>The validation and evaluation of strategic change initiatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evaluation of the strategic support mechanisms developed in phase two. This evaluation will be outcomes based using measured specific strategies, such as a focus group, attendance of seminar, feedback and evaluation questionnaires.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Framework and resources will be modified and improved based on the feedback collected. Investigating ways in which successful strategies can be sustained and scaled up through ongoing curriculum redesign</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The interrelationship between cohorts of students, areas of support and strategic implementation of supporting mechanisms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort of students</th>
<th>Area of support</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Students who need this area of support will be identified in Phase 1 | **Academic literacy support**  
  - Reading – the understanding of academic discourse, such as journal and research articles, the conceptualisation of theory and principles in the discipline.  
  - Note taking skills  
  - Writing skills, such as writing a persuasive essay, academic writing style & critical writing  
  - Communication skills for presentation and discussions | Strategies to support this group of students in this area will be developed in Phase 2 process one. |
| As above | **Numeracy support**  
  - The understanding of mathematical knowledge and skills required by different disciplines  
  - The development of such skills and knowledge | As above |
| As above | **Familiarisation with the learning environment in HE**  
  - IT support for different learning modes and facilities  
  - The different modes of delivery, such as online learning, lecture, tutorial and group work.  
  - Accessing library resources and research tools  
  - Enrolment procedures and access to student support services  
  - Transition from competency-based learning at TAFE to the theoretical orientation of Higher Education learning | As above |
| As above | **Pastoral care in general**  
  - Social interaction, such as developing a sense of belonging to the learning community, fostering friendship and trust with fellow students, getting to know the lecturers and unit co-ordinators and knowing where to get help when assistance is needed.  
  - Anxiety and time management | As above |

Impact of the Project

The original aim of the project was to address VET to HE transition issues from the perspective of a non dual sector provider, although it could be argued that similar transition issues exist for dual sectors given that there is a recognised shift in expectations of learning and teaching between VET and Higher Education curriculum. According to Harris, Rainey and Sumner (2005) students moving between educational sectors do not perceive their pathway journey as ‘seamless’, naming issues related to their personal lives, institutional administration systems and academic learning issues as significant barriers.

A one size fits all approach would be neither possible nor resource effective. The multi-faceted nature of the problem, together with the lack of program and cohort specific information has impeded progress to date. However the sector must act. According to Phillips KPA Report (2006): Institutions should employ agreed
measures to evaluate the effectiveness of their credit transfer and articulation arrangements in improving over time the mobility of students from VET to Higher Education. The Bradley Review Discussion Paper for Higher Education (2008) also emphasised the importance of a more cohesive and supportive system promoting access, inclusivity and collaboration across sectors.

Findings from the project have revealed the need for providing targeted support to VET students making the transition to university, especially prior to and during the early stages of commencing their degree studies. Feedback from students confirmed they welcome the challenge and differences of a new learning experience however they want to understand more about what to expect and how to prepare themselves. It is clear that students settle into the university environment reasonably well usually after the first teaching session and are more confident about what is expected of them in their studies but unfamiliarity is one of the stress factors during the early commencement phase. Many challenges experienced during this stage are not unique to VET students’, however shifting from a competency based learning structure to a more theory based system requires students to be supported with targeted strategies.

Findings

It is clear that for many students their expectations in relation to amount of work and study did not match with their experience. The table below displays results from students surveyed in regard to expectations and study workloads.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>More than expected (N)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amount of work you have to submit</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>43.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount of study you have to do</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>59.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount of preparation for class</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>53.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How hard the work is</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>36.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These findings were further supported by evidence that many students experience difficulty at first with a number of academic and non academic elements that are understood better and more confidently over time but are stress factors in the transition phase following offers being made, enrolment and their study commencement. Interestingly this was notable in a survey conducted in the second half of the year for a group of students who commenced at the start of the same year who reported being confident about these issues at the time of the survey but who had endured substantial stress earlier in the year when they commenced. The table below displays the significance of items regarded as difficult at first.
These findings led to a range of strategies being designed which will be efficient and sustainable in the longer term. The following strategies were developed with the involvement and expertise of key stakeholders in the target disciplines and in collaboration with support services within the university. This approach strengthened engagement and avoided duplication of effort whilst incorporating existing services and tailoring support mechanisms for the target group. The project has allowed a series of pilots to be delivered over the past 12-18 months and refined following feedback and evaluation. It is now accepted that the university has a responsibility to offer a range of transition support options to VET students who are offered pathways and admission.

### Project Approach and Methodology

The project was conducted over two years, 2009-2010, with a short extension phase in 2011 to more closely examine the impact of structured pathway experiences. Phase one of the project was an investigation into the transition experiences of VET students articulating to university, Phase Two, the development of strategies to support VET students in transition and Phase Three, evaluation and dissemination of outcomes.

The investigative phase of the project involved both quantitative and qualitative methods. At UWS, for example, surveys were conducted with all students who entered Nursing and Business programs via VET pathways in 2009 and who entered Nursing, Business and Early Childhood programs in 2010. A total of 529 students completed the survey, the largest group were from Business (N=368), followed by Nursing (N=143) and Early Childhood (N=19). This represented 33% of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Difficult at first %</th>
<th>Difficult %</th>
<th>Very Difficult %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enrolling in course or unit</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registering for tutorials</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment tasks</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic writing</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic conventions</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping up with course</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online environment</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course expectations</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English level</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maths level</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balancing demands of study and work</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the students who entered these programs on the basis of a VET qualification. In order to explore the issues in more detail students were invited in the survey to volunteer to take part in either focus groups or telephone interviews. Nine focus groups were held with a total of 33 students and another thirty students were interviewed by telephone. In 2009 and 2010, 451 students who had entered on the basis of a VET qualification withdrew from the university. A number of these students were followed up by telephone (N=44). Data from the university data management system provided broad entry information about admissions from the VET sector as a whole. In 2011 an extension was granted to explore particular questions around the benefits of structured pathways with 116 students responding to the survey.

Use and advancement of knowledge

Informing Literature
The project team was particularly interested in literature that dealt with the performance of VET students in higher education, the nature of pathways and with transition.

Performance of VET students in higher education
Wheelahan (2008b, p. 12) has observed that literature dealing with the transition experiences of students as they move from VET to HE is a relatively recent phenomena. One explanation for this “extraordinary gap”, according to Wheelahan, is the “more or less consistent finding over several years now that TAFE students, on the whole, have pass rates that are similar to school leavers in HE which demonstrates their capacity to study at HE level. There may not be, however, consistently equivalent performance on all measures”. For example, Tickell and Smyrnios (2004) found that among accounting students in their study, degree articulation students required significantly more attempts to pass all units than Year 12-to-university counterparts. Yet degree articulation students reported that they felt ‘ready’ for Year 2 and in the end their rates of completion were similar to the Year 12-to-university group.

Similar results have been recorded in the UK. In a large study covering three disciplines (Nursing, Computing and Business) over five institutions, Ertl, Hayward & Hoelscher (2010), reported that differences in educational background did not lead to a significant difference in perceptions of readiness. However this study did find that having a VET background did have a negative impact on retention rates at the end of the first year of study. Ertl and colleagues (2010, p81) suggest three possible reasons for this phenomenon; prior educational attainment, choice of educational institution and choice of discipline. This multi–institutional study found some evidence to suggest that VET students will do better in institutions with higher proportions of students entering through VET pathways. One factor that was an
important point of difference between VET students and students entering though the school system, was the greater need of the VET cohort for support and guidance.

‘Seamless’ Pathways?
Not all students who enter university on the basis of a VET qualification do so through a planned pathway. Cram and Watson (2008) note that student transition will be most successful when students enroll in relevant, highly articulated programs of study, rather than through less coherent routes. Another structural issue identified by Byrnes, Paez, Blacker, Jackson & Dwyer (2010) relates to credit transfer arrangements that allow students to articulate directly into second year. The area of particular concern for these students was student adaptation to academic scholarship and critical thinking. Other studies (see Brunken & Delly, 2010) have also pointed to problems that occur when students are awarded credit for the introductory subjects usually offered in first year and to the difficulty that lecturers will have identifying students articulating from VET.

Transition
Several recent studies have suggested that students articulating from the VET sector may need greater support in transition than students entering through traditional pathways. Ertl et al (2010) found that an important ingredient of success for students from VET backgrounds was the provision of support that would allow them to integrate their vocational experience into the new learning environment. Wheelahan (2008, p 13) points to a “growing awareness” of two key issues that impact on the transition experiences of students; the different curriculum models that exist in the VET sector and HE, and the more general experience of transfer shock. Wheelahan (2008a) has argued that the competency-based training packages that define learning in the VET sector may deny students access to the theoretical knowledge that underpins vocational practice. This knowledge is critical to educational progression in the discipline. Given these concerns it is not surprising that an increasing number of studies are pointing to difficulties that students from the VET sector appear to face with the more theoretical and critical approaches to knowledge that characterize learning in HE. Watson (2008, p 44) suggests that these different orientations to learning may be one reason why students admitted on the basis of a TAFE qualification “often struggle to meet university expectations regarding academic literacy.” A number of studies have concluded that students will need additional support to develop advanced academic literacies and have suggested approaches that encompass bridging programs, mentoring and embedding of academic literacy development into programs (see for example Aitchison, Catterall, Docket & Perry, 2006. Watson, 2008). Jackson, Dwyer, Byrnes & Blacker (2010) identified ‘transition shock’ as one of the transition issues experienced by respondents in their study as a result of the different administrative and educational systems operating in the two
sectors. Krause and Coates (2008, p 7) also note that a form of culture shock can occur in transition and conclude that too great a gap between experience and reality can lead to a failure to persist. In the past the responsibility for adapting to the new higher education culture was seen as chiefly the responsibility of individual learners. In recent years it has increasingly been seen as the role of institutions to implement inclusive curricular practices that will enable learners entering from diverse pathways to participate successfully (Thomas, 2002, Haggis, 2006, Kift, Nelson & Clark, 2010).

**Strategies**

**Academic Preparation Seminars**

These seminars have been designed for people who have applied to University for the following teaching session on the basis of their VET studies. A list of applicants for a discipline or course are targeted and sent an invitation to attend a seminar that is specific to the degree they have applied for. The purpose of the seminar is to provide VET students with the opportunity to come to a University campus, usually to a Lecture Theatre in a friendly and welcoming setting.

The 3 hour seminars are designed in conjunction with the relevant academic staff and aim at providing an introduction to aspects of University study and conventions relevant to their chosen discipline. Showing students a realistic snapshot of the kinds of systems and work that they will encounter when they come to University is intended to provide a real life view of what to expect. This is supported by existing 2nd year student peers who also entered on the basis of a VET qualification who discuss their experiences when starting out and what they have done to overcome challenges and issues encountered. This is a powerful part of the seminar and allows participants to see and hear how their peers have managed their degree studies. Pilots have been delivered for Early Childhood students on 2 campuses in late 2010 (80 students attended), and in the mid year 2011 for Business and Law applicants (50 students attended).

Feedback from participants indicated the sessions to be worthwhile and informative. They especially liked the opportunity to talk with academic staff and that the sessions are tailored to their discipline. Highlights are the interactive components and existing student stories and experiences. They also welcomed information on bridging programs and preparatory workshops available with strong encouragement from 2nd year students to attend these if possible. Early reports from the coordinators of these programs indicate a significant rise in registrations compared to 2010. Participants appreciated the seminars being well organised, easy to register for and welcoming with good food and a resource pack provided for each attendee. These sessions are planned to continue and be rolled out to other disciplines where substantial numbers of students enter through a VET admission pathway.
Welcome packs for VET students
Welcome packs containing a letter, fliers on bridging programs and other support services as well as a VET peer guide for VET pathway student brochure was sent by mail to every commencing student who was admitted on the basis of a VET qualification in the Main Admissions Round for 2011. This also contained information on VET pathways and credit transfer sites for students to check if they were eligible for credit under formalised arrangements. The packs were designed not to overwhelm students but provide easy to access details they could pursue if and when required.
The above VET peer guide brochure is being developed into a booklet by Student Support Services to be included with their range of peer guides available for a wide range of students entering University from different access points.

VET Transition Web page

A web page has been designed for commencing students that highlights some of the differences they may encounter. These differences were developed directly from
student feedback from the project. The web page also contains links to other services such as the Student Learning Unit and Getting Help sites designed to provide information and support to students. The “Tips for starting out @uni” site continues to be developed. It is located on the VET pathways web page http://myfuture.uws.edu.au/informationabout/vet_pathways

VET Student Peer Contact Program
This program has been developed for piloting in mid 2011 to a small group of Business students. Student volunteers in 2nd year of the Bachelor of Business and Commerce degree have received training to provide a buddy type support system for new students. The program is designed to offer both online discussions and face-to-face weekly meetings for the first four weeks of session. This may change once the pilot has occurred and we work with the peer contacts to see what students are wanting, if they engage and how we can best provide information and support. The Peer Contact site is on vUWS which is a student portal at UWS for accessing all kinds of information related to courses and units as well as a range of other material. Again, links to other areas are included in this site.

Mentoring Program for Distance Students
Charles Sturt University has introduced a Pilot Mentoring program for students coming from VET into VET teacher preparation and Industry Entry TAS programs.
ETP (Education Technology Program)

This program was developed in response to the reliance on university technologies for students to access information and study resources. ETP sessions were held as part of the UniStep program and were also available as online workshops.

About the Education Technology Program

Confused by the University’s online systems?

- Do you know how to do online research or find resources using the library website?
- Do you know what computer software are available in the campus computer lab and how to print your document at campus?
- Do you know what ‘vUWS’ is?
- Do you know where and how to find your lecturer’s announcements or assessments in vUWS?
- Do you know how podcasts and Lectures Online work in vUWS?

The Student Learning Unit (SLU) has an online program called Education Technology Preparation (IT) that is specifically designed to introduce new students to the online study environment at UWS. In this program, you will learn how to use the library online research and services, computer lab, printing facilities, vUWS (the online learning environment at UWS) and access podcasts and Lectures Online.

Modifications to the UniStep Enabling Programs and the Educational Technology Preparation Programs

One of the findings of the investigative stage of the study was that many students did not know about the enabling and preparation programs provided by the university and that some had difficulty accessing these programs because of family and work commitments. In 2010 the Student Learning Unit was asked to develop more flexible options of the most common preparation programs. This included offering for the first time in 2011 a blended UniStep academic literacies program, that was suitable for students in full time work and offering the Educational Technology Preparation Program on weekends and evenings. Information about the availability of these programs was provided at the pre-offer Academic Preparation seminars and in the Welcome Packs and on the VET Transition Web page. The strategies appear to have been successful with students from VET backgrounds attending preparation programs at almost double the rate that they are represented in the university population.
Transferability of Approach

Wide dissemination of the project outcomes and associated strategies has resulted in other universities seeking details on various aspects of a structured articulation pathways model and how associated elements were resourced, established and now maintained. Several university representatives have expressed interest in replicating components of the proven framework used to manage VET to HE pathways, credit transfer and transition. Explicit information has been sought on:

- development of a designated position to manage VET to HE relationships
- design of credit transfer that does not provide a blanket first year
- design and implementation of an online pathways credit processing system
- design and implementation of Academic Preparation Seminars and other transition strategies

This information has been willingly shared with the intention of encouraging other universities to learn from our experiences and avoid duplication of effort. Many of the strategies are adaptable and can be customised to suit the context and needs of the institution. This project has also steadily increased awareness and engagement of university stakeholders within our own organisations about the importance of responsible and targeted support. Those who have participated thus far agree that time spent in the early stages of a student’s transition is well invested for both students and academics alike. This project has also highlighted the importance of capturing the student voice and using their feedback when designing support mechanisms. The ability to understand what is happening for students at the time of transition and building strategies that directly respond to these mean the likelihood of engagement is greater if a benefit can be identified as relevant when offering support.

Dissemination of Outcomes

Early in the project it was evident that a range of stakeholders were interested in the research and models for managing VET to HE articulation and transition. Interest was widespread and included VET providers, policymakers, government departments, researchers and higher education representatives. There has also been noted interest in the project internationally where details of the project were disseminated to groups such as lifelong learning networks, community and university partnership program members and widening participation entities. The project team has disseminated its findings and associated actions and strategies that have emerged from the research to a broad range of audiences. Details of the project were disseminated in a diverse range of contexts including seminars, conferences, forums, meetings and face to face networking environments.
Australian Networks


**AVETRA - Australian Vocational Education & Training Research Association**

Conference *Janus - Looking back, projecting forward* (Melbourne 2011)
Presentation “Paving a better path: VET to HE transition”

Australian Qualifications Framework – Strengthening the AQF
Policy Guidelines Workshop – Pathways (Melbourne 2011)

**AALL - Association for Academic Language and Learning – Social Inclusion Seminar**

Poster presentation “Closing the gap” (Wollongong 2011) [www.aall.org.au/](http://www.aall.org.au/)

**HERDSA – Higher Education Research Development Society of Australasia**

Conference “Higher Education –on the Edge” (Gold Coast Queensland 2011)
Presentation “Educational Journeys: the challenges of transition from VET to HE”

**NCVER – National Centre for Vocational Education Research**

No Frills Conference (Coffs Harbour, NSW 2011)
Presentation “Celebrating Seams”

Associated ‘Campus Review’ article

**CSU - Charles Sturt University**

Learning and Teaching conference (Wagga campus 2011)
Presentation on VET to HE transition for Distance students

International Networks

Project dissemination opportunities emerged in conjunction with visits and presentations on related topics during a widening participation study tour in 2010 in the UK. These included:

**UCL – University College of London**
(Transition strategies and Peer Mentoring programs) [www.ucl.ac.uk/](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/)

**CUC - Combined Universities of Cornwall** (FE and HE access for student learning, transition and retention, widening participation programs) [info@cuc.ac.uk](mailto:info@cuc.ac.uk)

CUC visits included:

**University College of Falmouth** – Tremough campus [www.falmouth.ac.uk/](http://www.falmouth.ac.uk/)

**University of Exeter** – Tremough campus [www.exeter.ac.uk/](http://www.exeter.ac.uk/)

**Cornwall Peninsula program** [www.plymouth.ac.uk/pages/view.asp?page=10495](http://www.plymouth.ac.uk/pages/view.asp?page=10495)
Enhancing the student experience: transition from vocational education and training to higher education

Cornwall - Neighbourhoods for Change program [www.cn4c.org.uk/]

Truro College [www.trurocollege.ac.uk/]

Birmingham University – Widening Participation Program [www.hefce.ac.uk/widen/ln/funded/networks/birm.htm]

Birmingham - Black Country and Solihull Lifelong Learning Network [www.bbcslln.ac.uk/]

Brighton University (Community & University Partnerships Program) CUPP Delivered seminar: VET to HE Relationships and Transition [www.brighton.ac.uk/cupp/]

University of Hong Kong - Enhancing Learning: experiences in Higher Education Conference presentation: “Enhancing student experience: stories of transition between the Vocational Education and Training Sector and Higher Education” [www.cetl.hku.hk/conference2010/] (Hong Kong 2010)


A number of articles have also been submitted to journals based on the project findings.

Links between other ALTC projects and ALTC Strategic Priority Areas

This project addressed two ALTC priority areas: research and development focusing on issues of emerging and continuing importance and strategic approaches to learning and teaching addressing the increasing diversity of the student body. With the release of the Bradley Report (2008) calling for more cohesive and seamless pathways between the VET sector and higher education, the successful transition of VET students to higher education became an issue of national importance and focus. The project team was grateful for assistance on project design and dissemination contained in the ‘Managing Your Project’ website and to the various reports on project dissemination. The project benefited from ALTC reports that focused on issues of student diversity. The project ‘Diversity: A longitudinal study of how student diversity relates to resilience and successful progression in a new generation university’ ([http://www.altc.edu.au/resource-diversity-longitudinal-study-ecu-2009](http://www.altc.edu.au/resource-diversity-longitudinal-study-ecu-2009)), both informed and confirmed our discussions of potential strategies. The project team has noted the relevance of several projects currently in progress that relate to inclusive enabling and transition strategies for diverse groups of students.
Factors critical to and impeding project success

Factors critical to the success of the project

As the project focused on the transition experiences of students who entered university on the basis of a VET qualification, the composition of the team was critical to the success of the project. The team consisted of members who have institutional strategic responsibility for VET pathways, the VET Relationships Manager, whose role encompasses both the structural arrangements for pathways and credit transfer and the experience of students and two members from the Student Learning Unit with experience in first year enabling programs and student transition. The key members of the project team met regularly and clear responsibilities and time lines were defined. Team members from UWS and CSU met face to face for an extended time to discuss results and at other times communicated by email. Both institutions developed literature reviews and these were shared to ensure that both institutions were working from a common theoretical base. Support and engagement from outside the project team was also critical to the success of the project including:

- ALTC in relation to mentoring and funding
- universities, particularly the survey design and distribution unit
- contact service centre
- professional units such as the Registrar’s Office – Admissions, Student Systems and Communications teams
- academic units in Early Childhood, Business, Law and Nursing
- engagement of students

Factors that impeded its success

The major factor that impeded success was the difficulty at UWS of recruiting an experienced research assistant. This resulted in more workload pressure on the team. In addition there was a need for greater ongoing collaboration between project members at the different sites. This was mainly the result of time pressures but may have been alleviated if the team had made greater use of technology designed for communicating at a distance. Team members from each of the institutions had considerable expertise and experience and the team as a whole could have benefitted from more opportunities for sharing this knowledge.
References


