

Creating a community of practice for international students: the role of academic peer learning in supporting their transition and integration into higher education.

Ulster University, The University of Brighton and The University of Edinburgh

Research team:

Professor Melanie Giles, Katie Scott and Catherine McConnell

Appendix 1

The questionnaire was designed to collect demographic information (e.g. age, gender and origin of birth) and to assess a range of measures most of which employed a Likert format ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Examples of the types of questions used to assess each measure are given below:

Satisfaction:

- I found the sessions useful, enjoyable, interesting
- I found the sessions relevant to my area of study
- The sessions increased my knowledge

Academic Performance:

- The sessions helped me to feel more prepared to complete my assignments and exams.
- The sessions helped me to see how to transfer my skills from one situation to another.
- The sessions helped me improve my grades.

Student Belonging:

- I feel part of a group of students and staff committed to learning.
- I feel I belong to the university community.
- I am able to explore ideas confidently with other people.

Student Engagement:

- Coming to class every day is very characteristic of who I am.
- I am the sort of person who raises their hand in class to ask questions when I don't understand something.
- I do my best to stay on top of the readings.

Working with Others:

- I can work towards a shared goal.
- I work well as a member of a group or team.
- I can collaborate well with others.

Listening:

- I am a good listener.
- I am able to match my body language appropriately to what is being said.
- I am able to respond appropriately to others' comments during a conversation.

Writing Skills:

- I am able to express myself well in writing.
- I am confident in my ability to present my ideas in written form.
- My written communication skills are good.

Spoken Communication:

- I am able to express my views verbally.
- I am confident speaking in front of a group of people.
- I can prepare, plan and deliver a presentation.

Academic Commitment:

- I am determined to complete my studies successfully.
- I will persist with my studies until I complete my degree.

- I am the kind of person who thrives on studying.

Confidence:

- I feel confident analysing a problem to find a solution.
- I feel confident contributing to group discussions.
- I feel confident presenting information to a group of peers.

Problem Solving:

- There are lots of ways round any problem.
- If I should find myself in a jam, I could think of many ways to get out of it.
- I am good at solving problems.

Goal Setting:

- I can think of many ways to reach my current work goals.
- I am currently meeting the work goals I have set myself.
- I am good at setting realistic goals for myself.

Resilience:

- When I have a setback at university, I have trouble recovering from it.
- If something can go wrong for me work-wise, it will.
- I consider myself to be a resilient person.

Optimism:

- I always look on the bright side of things regarding university.
- I'm optimistic about what will happen to me in the future as it pertains to university.
- In this degree, things never work out the way I want them to.

Appendix 2

The interviews and focus groups adopted a semi-structured approach. The following questions were used to facilitate discussion:

Opening questions (relating to broader sense of engagement and inclusion in UK academic life).

1. What do you remember about the weeks and months when you first moved to the UK for study?

(Prompt: what changes happened - elicit any sense of loss / supports removed, any specific difficulties / any positive experiences? Culture shock?)

2. As international students, do you feel that X University has assisted with your adjustment into UK academic life?

(Prompt: what was the assistance e.g. Fresher orientation events / did you need the assistance / was it enough / was information easy to find)

3. What does it mean to you to be an international student studying in the UK?

(Prompt: retaining sense of cultural identity)

4. To what extent do you feel a part of the university and a part of your class group?

(Prompt: engagement in extra-curricular activities/sporting teams/clubs and societies)

5. What attracted you to Northern Ireland as a place to come and study?

PASS Experience(s)

6. (a) How did you find out about PASS at X university?

(Prompt: peers/lecturers/own initiative)

And

(b) Why did you decide to get involved?

7. If you have engaged with PASS, how often have you attended sessions?

8. If you have not engaged with/or heard of the PASS scheme, do you think it would be something that would have benefited you?

(Prompt: if yes, in what ways? If no, why not?)

9. What type of activities have you engaged in during your PASS sessions?

10. Has PASS helped you (if at all) settle into general university life?

(Prompt: safe space/belonging)

11. Has PASS helped you (if at all) with your academic studies?

(Prompt: being able to ask questions/discuss course material)

12. Are there any other benefits you can think of? Has the scheme helped you develop in any other ways?

(Prompt: enhanced peer relationships/confidence/study skills)

13. Has your membership of PASS affected (positively or negatively) your experience of university?

14. Are there any disadvantages in attending PASS?

15. How have you found your PASS Leaders?

(FOR PASS LEADERS)

12(b). How have you found being a PASS Leader?

16. Would you consider being a PASS Leader? If so, is there anything you would do differently?

Looking to the Future

17. What steps could PASS organisers take to improve the experiences of international students in the future?
18. Would you recommend PASS to other (international) students? Why/why not?
19. If you spoke to someone about to leave their home to study abroad, what advice would you give them about making a successful transition to UK academic life?

(Prompt: who to talk to, what to be aware of, success stories).

Appendix 3

Loughborough Students' Union Cultural Inclusivity and Diversity Training

The training consists of 4 sections, and a reflective assignment. The duration of training lasts around 45 minutes and will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. The training was designed with staff from both Loughborough Students' Union and Loughborough University as well as student Executive Officers.

The content is summarised below. There is a mixture of videos, activities, quizzes and reading sections throughout.

Section 1 – The legal framework around Equality and Diversity

The Equality act and Protected Characteristics

Other differences which may impact the University experience e.g. Socio-economic, language, academic ability, as well as goals and interests.

Definitions of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

What is discrimination? Direct discrimination, perceptive discrimination, associative discrimination and indirect discrimination.

What is harassment?

What are Active Bystanders?

An Equal Opportunity Case study.

Section 2 – Diversity at Loughborough

Understanding the Loughborough University Population: A quiz about percentage of mature, international, female, registered disabled students etc.

Promoting diversity – ongoing campaigns.

Welfare and Diversity events on campus.

Section 3 – How we can encourage and learn more about Diversity

Considering the assumptions we make.

Inclusivity in practice: Tips and tricks i.e. Labelling food, asking how to pronounce someone's name, speaking at a slower pace, avoiding idioms, asking for feedback, awareness of religious holidays etc.

Making mistakes and the need for reflection.

Asking questions.

Inclusive language.

Other communication considerations.

Section 4 – Unconscious Bias and tackling discrimination

What is Unconscious Bias?

Understanding Unconscious Bias.

How can we prevent unconscious bias influencing our decisions?

What to do if you experience discrimination.

The ongoing process of learning about equality and diversity.

Reflective Assignment (400 – 500 words)

‘Consider the Union generally, as well as your Education volunteer role and the work you do to support students.

- a) Why is diversity important? What does it bring to a scheme or an organisation?
- b) What is being done well to promote diversity?
- c) What ideas do you have for developing an inclusive environment?’

If you would like more information on the Cultural Inclusivity and Diversity Training at Loughborough Students’ Union please contact Hannah McManmon:

hannahmcmanmon@lsu.co.uk