

What Works? Student Retention & Success



Supporting student success: strategies for institutional change

Newman University
April 2017

By Sarah Parkes, Helen Cousins
and Graham Brotherton

1. Contextual overview

In 2012, a small group of academic and professional staff at Newman University successfully applied for inclusion in Phase 2 of the longitudinal (2012-15) 'What Works?' Student Retention and Success Programme. What Works? Student Retention & Success is a Paul Hamlyn Foundation initiative working with the Higher Education Academy, Action on Access and thirteen UK universities from across the UK. The second phase (What Works?2) focused on implementing and evaluating the findings from of What Works?1 (Thomas, 2012).

1.1 The Institution and the disciplines

1.1.1 The University

Newman University is a Catholic university committed to a Mission of Service. The University directs research towards a demonstrable impact on society whilst making higher education accessible to members of under-represented groups customarily deprived of it. This is achieved through promoting student and staff *formation* which is defined in the strategic plan as:

- Education for a reflective mind, for well-being and for human flourishing;
- within a community of intellectual enquiry, which is
- dedicated to the construction of the common good, the transformation of its members' lives and of the world they serve and engage with

(Newman University, 2014, p 3).

It is likely that the achievement of University status in 2013 brought with it a stronger sense of belonging for both staff and students to the university community as a whole. Student recruitment at Newman University remains overwhelmingly local with 93% of our cohort identified as 'commuter students'. This indicates the importance for the University of positioning belonging in the academic sphere as most students are not resident on campus and are thus more likely to retain their social links outside the university.

As noted in the 2016/17 Access Agreement (p 1), Newman University continues to exceed benchmarks for recruiting students from under-represented groups. Maintaining these achievements in widening access whilst improving retention and progression however, has historically been challenging. Pressing issues are non-continuation after the first year; the high number of students undertaking re-sits that potentially impact on their cohort membership and therefore on their sense of belonging and; the high proportion of students completing with a qualification below that originally enrolled upon.

Newman University saw participation in *What Works?2* as a device that supported institution-wide change rather than explicit discipline-specific change, though the former necessarily informed and affected the latter. The aim of involvement therefore was to support delivery of institutionally coherent and participatory educational practices that promote successful progression through the restructuring of undergraduate degree programmes.

1.1.2 Core team and discipline information

Core Team

Professor Duncan Lawson (Pro-Vice Chancellor: Formative Education), Dr. Helen Cousins (Academic Lead), Julian Bache (Planning & Systems development: data expert) Louise Jones/Jane Allcroft (Level 5 Students) and Sarah Parkes (Project Lead).

Participating disciplines

Programme name	Working with Children, Young People and Families (WWCYPF)	Initial Teacher Education: Primary (ITE)	Joint Honours with Education and Multi Professional Practice (EMPP)
Full or part-time	Both	Both	Full time
Discipline lead	Graham Brotherton	Deborah Boekestein	Helen Davies
Team member(s)	Clare Monk	Sue Strawford	Clare Bright, Richard Sanders & Steve Dixon
Thematic area	Active Learning /Co-curricular	Induction	Co-curricular

1.1.3 Significant Internal Changes

Newman University has experienced significant internal structural and strategic change during the last three to four years. Internal changes came with substantial challenges for the core team, necessitating continuous and sustained effort in promoting the work of the project and assert its value amid a complex set of circumstances some of which were admittedly intertwined with the project aims. However, as key positions were filled (see points iv. and v. below) the University developed wider understanding of the fundamental principles of the project and the interventions amongst staff. During this time, a key staff appointment was the Pro-Vice Chancellor: Formative Education (see v below) who led the project within the Senior Management Team and could drive the *What Works?* agenda forward. Indeed, it was important that the literature, findings from institutional research projects and *What Works?1* influenced the changes. This included generating an increased awareness and commitment to promoting student belonging through strategies enabling the heterogeneous student body to succeed; and not primarily through strategies that sought to change the intake. This is based on the view that student engagement and success is promoted by institutional transformation (Jones and Thomas 2005, p. 615-630) whereby attention focuses on what is within the control of the HEI - such as the curriculum - 'rather than wishing for a more homogenous or traditional student body' (Thomas and May 2011, p. 12).

These changes and rationales are outlined below:

i. Institutional work on Transition and Induction: An Academic Practice Fellowship (2012-13)

This Academic Practice Fellowship into transition and induction investigated how student belonging was nurtured through student-centred learning, teaching and assessment delivered through timetabled sessions in the academic curriculum during the first year. Such sessions should start in induction week rather than being left until after teaching begins. Historically, the distinctions between enrolment activities and induction activities at Newman were not clear. The presentation of enrolment activities as 'induction' obscured the need for subject areas to be fully integrated into the processes of settling in their students. This project suggested interventions that encouraged all subject areas to spend more substantial and meaningful time with students during induction doing activities that started to develop cohort identity, student belonging and allowed students to develop academic and personal confidence as independent, self-regulating learners. It placed equal importance on proposing activities within the first year of undergraduate study as well as during induction, and offering guidance for ongoing work with students at key transition points throughout their studies.

- ii. Institution-wide portfolio review 2012-13**
 This review was underpinned by a drive to streamline programmes through removing a ‘mix and match’ feel to combined honours routes thus promoting cohort identity. This review reduced the number of programmes from over 140 to 34. Major/Minor programme combinations and other non-cognate joint programmes were discontinued resulting in changes to programme responsibility for students on Combined Honours routes. Where historically such students were supported via a Combined Honours programme leader, the Review disaggregated responsibilities for students on new Joint Honours programmes across the subject areas. The mechanism for appointing co-ordinators and defining their duties has been variably implemented across the range of subject areas.
- iii. Reconfiguration programme structure.**
 Supporting implementation of a new programme structure was an explicit institutional and strategic aim of *What Works?* for Newman. In October 2012 alongside the completion of the Portfolio review, what was Academic Board (now Senate) determined that from the academic year 2014/15 all undergraduate courses would move to a 20-credit framework. This was envisaged as reflecting the sector providing consistency of structure and student effort within and across programmes. This was to coincide with implementation of the new portfolio during in 2014/15. Hence, during 2013/14 all undergraduate programmes – including existing routes – were revalidated as programmes based on a 20-credit modular structure. This was a considerable undertaking in terms of both rewriting programmes for new students, but also the logistics of supporting those continuing on the discontinued routes.
- iv. Appointment of two Pro-Vice Chancellors to form a new Senior Management Team**
 A ‘PVC: Formative Education’ was recruited to and in post March 2013 to oversee all aspects of teaching & learning and academic standards.
 A ‘PVC: Research and Scholarship’ was recruited to and in post April 2013 with oversight of research developments to support both staff and research students.
- v. Closure of Learning Development and establishment of an Academic Practice Unit**
 In July 2012, the Learning Development Unit closed. In the interim period, it became clear that establishing the Academic Practice Unit (APU) was crucial to staff development and thus *formation*. Appointed in 2014, a Head of Academic Practice now leads the APU ensuring that findings from *What Works? 1* are an integral part of its development.
- vi. Programme relocation**
 Education Studies moved from the School of Human Sciences to the School of Education. The subject area itself then merged with Continuing Professional Development to become Education and Multi-Professional Practice (EMPP). However, the *What Works? 2* discipline team retained its membership and worked within the same programme as on the original evaluation plan. The subject area continues to be managed by the same Head of Subject ensuring continuity of support for staff involvement in the project.
- vii. Associate Deans of School**
 This new role was established as initially an *interim* position in 2012 to support the work of each School, with the roles becoming permanent in 2014.
- viii. New Strategic plan approved 2014-2020**
 Following achievement of University status, a new Strategic Plan was agreed by the governing body in 2014/15, with underpinning strategies following on from this to achieve the main aims.

1.2 External national context

1.2.1 Welfare Reform

During the lifespan of the project, government policy affected Newman students and staff in a variety of ways. As indicated in our HESA statistics for widening access (Higher Education Statistics Agency - HESA, 2016), Newman University students and their families are more likely to be dependent on a variety of welfare provision than the sector average. This is due to their socio-economic background, disability and familial circumstances. Policy changes to welfare provision therefore potentially make it harder for students to sustain their progression at university because of the pressure to earn more from employment to support their families and/or dependents. For example: The Welfare Reform Act 2012 (Parliament. House of Commons) enabled changes to benefits such as the *Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy* from 1 April 2013. According to Moffat *et al*, this has negatively affected individuals, families and communities by causing ‘...extreme levels of anxiety, stress, fear and hopelessness, which [...] has been found to threaten the bond between individuals and their social environment.’ Thus, the likelihood that Newman students are experiencing such circumstances is high given their backgrounds. Indeed, our internal monitoring of institutional Welfare provision indicates a 10% rise in student numbers seeking welfare support; with a 46% increase in students with complex problems regularly returning for further guidance, and a 12% increase in housing related issues.

1.2.2 Services provision

A substantial proportion of Newman University programmes are designed to prepare students for employment in sectors relating to Education, Youth & Community Work or public services. In all of these programmes, having to react to fluctuating government policy increases staff workload as this often requires revalidation of modules in response to external factors. This is in addition to internal requirements to revalidate, such as the 20-credit project at Newman. In areas such as Education, uncertainty over and changes to teacher education provision such as Schools Direct (see Department for Education, 2013) has created challenges for staff in the School of Education in relation to job security and a significant change to working practices.

1.2.3 Rise in tuition fees

Although the sector-wide increase in fees can create debt aversion for some students (see Callender and Jackson, 2005) Newman continues to recruit despite rises in tuition fees since 2012/13. The 2015 report to the Office for Fair Access (Nursaw Associates, 2015) suggests this may be due to more relaxed ‘debt-savvy’ or ‘debt resigned’ attitudes towards debt (Harrison *et al*, 2015). Such attitudes see the cost of HE as outweighed by other factors such as: the appropriateness of the programme of study; the likelihood it will lead to a job; the location of the institution and/or the possibility to remain living at home (Bowes *et al* in Nursaw Associates, 2015). However, the rise in fees may have perpetuated the above benchmark non-continuation rates at Newman that had until 2012/13 been gradually improving (see Fig. 6 and 7).

2. Impact data

Between 2012-15 the project data expert at Newman University provided cohort data to the Paul Hamlyn Foundation. Success was defined by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation in relation to the meta-analysis as being the award of at least 96 credits at the relevant level in the year. Successive cohorts within the disciplines were also surveyed during the programme to assess their sense of belonging to their respective university. This process was repeated across all 13 participating universities. Further methodological details and findings from this meta-analysis will be reported in the final UK wide programme report. The impact data at Newman monitored all students on ITE Primary and WWCYPF undergraduate programmes. In relation to joint honours programmes, only students on Joint Honours EMPP (JH EMPP) and Sports Studies programmes were monitored.

2.1 Newman University discipline areas and commentary

The discipline cohorts are not all of the same size or of a similar demographic:

- i. ITE Primary recruits around 100 students on average a year: 20 % are male and 80% female. The majority (76%) of students on ITE Primary are under 21 years of age.
- ii. Joint Honours EMPP and Sports Studies recruits around 36 students a year and has a larger cohort of males on average (57%) than other EMPP Joint Honours programme as across all EMPP joint honours programmes, 72% on average are female. The majority of students (77%) on EMMPP Joint Honours routes including Sports Studies are under 21 years of age.
- iii. Over the *What Works?2* project the number of students on the WWCYPF undergraduate programme has fluctuated from 60 in 13/14 to 27 in 14/15, which may be in part due to the external context affecting recruitment as suggested in section 1.2.1. This programmes cohort is almost exclusively female (96%) with age spread across the range: 46% of students are under 21 years; 21% of students are between 21-25 years old and 33% of students are over 25 years old.

Project-wide analysis sought to understand the extent that progression and achievement statistics fit with the expectations of the enhancements that have taken place under *What Works?2*. The findings produced for Newman University in this regard by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation report at a single institutional level and can only highlight 'better, worse, or the same' in progression, retention and success.

From impact data produced by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation in March 2016 for cohorts entering in 2013 and 2014, 'success' at level four as defined above stays the same for both ITE (79%) and WWCYPF (94%) programmes. For Joint Honours EMPP and Sports Studies however, 'success' has worsened from 84% (2013) to 69% (2014) of students achieving 96 credits or more at the end of level four.

3. Planning for and implementing change

3.1 Overview of institutional approach

Newman's approach to involvement in the *What Works?* Programme was to use it as a vehicle to support institution-wide change that entwined findings from both *What Works?1* and previous institutional projects within implementation of a 20-credit modular framework. Participation was therefore not seen as developing something new in addition to the changes already afoot but as influencing those activities to ensure that findings from *What Works?1* were taken into account and embedded in practice.

The Academic Practice Fellowship (APF) in 2012 (see 1.1.3i) highlighted that we were already 'doing things to' the students. The focus therefore shifted to building staff capacity: moving from a rather complacent attitude towards students to one that accepted a need to be more proactive in supporting student progression and success. In particular, fostering collaborative and student-centred approaches that 'facilitate staff and student interaction, enabling students to develop academically and staff to [...] better understand [...] their students' (Thomas and May 2011, p. 11).

3.2 Discipline selection

The core team was formed based upon the guidance given by the HEA, previous experience and enthusiasm of individuals interested in retention and success alongside their institutional role, working with students and programme leads to develop staff capacity to affect change. For each year of the project, this included a student member who was drawn from the pool of level five 'Staff Student Consultative Committees' (SSCC) course reps in participating programmes. These contributions were felt to be more representative of the student voice than those within our student union executive whose role was somewhat distanced.

The project and academic lead initially met with Heads of subject and Programme Leaders from areas where the diversity of students was evident or where, through informal conversation, concern around specific issues were known. At the beginning of the project, all discipline areas involved had volunteered to participate.

However, complications arose when the Combined Honours Programme Leader role ended leaving this area without leadership making how to move forward for one area problematic. Subsequently, the focus was shifted to specifically work with programmes that contain Education and Multi Professional Practice (EMPP) as a Joint Honours route (History, English, Theology, WWCYPF, Counselling, Art and Sports Studies), rather than generically across a combined honours programme. Thus, colleagues working in this area were not necessarily volunteers to *What Works?* but interested in issues of student identity, experience and progression.

3.3 Interventions selected

3.3.1 Working with Children, Young People and Families (WWCYPF): Active Learning and Co-curricular

WWCYPF recruits a very diverse student population, including a high proportion of non-traditional students. Whilst continuation at level four was encouraging (e.g. 11/12=96%), a substantial number of students each year required re-sits in order to facilitate progression onto level five, with this pattern repeating itself within progression from level five to six studies. With expertise spread across the team in utilising Threshold Concepts (see Meyer and Land, 2003) within an extended induction in 2012, WWCYPF chose to expand this work further across the themes of Active Learning and Co-curricular activities with the aim of reducing the number of students with resits.

3.3.2 Initial Teacher Education (Primary): Induction

Whilst level four continuation is good (e.g. 11/12 = 93%) in Initial Teacher Education (Primary), the programme historically 'lost' students as they moved through levels five and six as they struggled to become independent and resilient learners. The support students were given at level four was not adequate in preparing students for their school placements thus impacting on their ability to successfully complete it. They were thus not able to successfully make the transition from level four study into teaching practice resulting in re-sits and an interruption to their studies as they were required to suspend whilst waiting to re-sit their school experience modules. The programme team identified that the students needed a 're-induction' when returning particularly as such students were then out of phase with their original cohort. Colleagues from ITE Primary therefore chose to focus their work on Induction to reduce the number of students needing re-sits and improve the progression of those students re-joining their programme.

3.3.3 Education and Multi-Professional Practice: Co-curricular

Maintaining a coherent experience across two subjects to promote cohort identity was historically the responsibility of a Combined Honours Programme Leader. This role was discontinued in the portfolio review and subsequent move to 20-credits: students studying two subjects are organised onto discrete programmes via their named degree rather than through an overarching Combined Honours route. Thus, the issue of promoting and ensuring cohort identity has become the remit of the individual subject areas running joint programmes. The subject area running the most programmes in combination is Education and Multi-Professional Practice so the third intervention was situated in this subject area. The intervention was themed as Co-curricular and integrated into education modules across level four, and aimed to improve a student's sense of identity as a learner in HE.

3.4 Team working

3.4.1 Communication and support

The project lead co-ordinated and facilitated discussions at both formal and informal meetings for both the core project staff and discipline leads. Team working, communication and support within the disciplines was organised by the discipline leads. Involvement in the project was centred on implementation of the 20-credit framework thus core team activity was about influencing the direction this took. The detail of activities within discipline teams therefore rested with them as they were encouraged to experiment with the framework.

3.4.2 Formal meetings and feedback

The project team took an institution-wide perspective to communication and support. Meetings were organised for core members to enable discussion on strategic progress and were held at key points in the year e.g. beginning of semesters, mid-point and end of semester/year. The core team met regularly allowing colleagues to grow into their roles, developing in confidence and understanding of their contributions to the project.

Regular meetings for both core and discipline participants allowed staff to share their progress and discuss challenges across the interventions, and again were organised at key points of the year. The project lead regularly updated Learning and Teaching Committee, and submitted a formal report at the end of each academic year of the project.

In addition, the off campus meetings that were organised by the HEA as part of the institutional commitment to the project provided spaces for teams to work together.

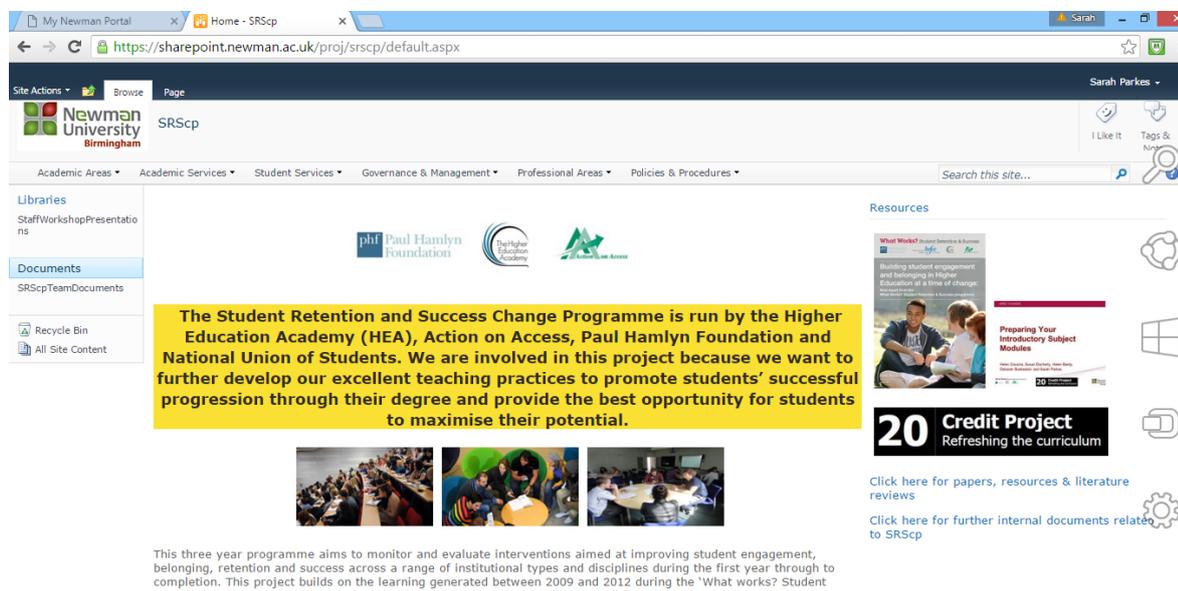
3.4.3 Informal mechanisms

As an institution with a collegiate culture, formal meetings were supplemented by informal chats over coffee between the project, academic and discipline leads to discuss progress, challenges and ways in which further support could be given. Discipline areas were thus responsible for their own interventions with support offered from members of the core team on an 'as-needed' basis. The nature of informal conversation was to overcome any obstacles or challenges that discipline areas faced.

3.4.4 Information Sharing

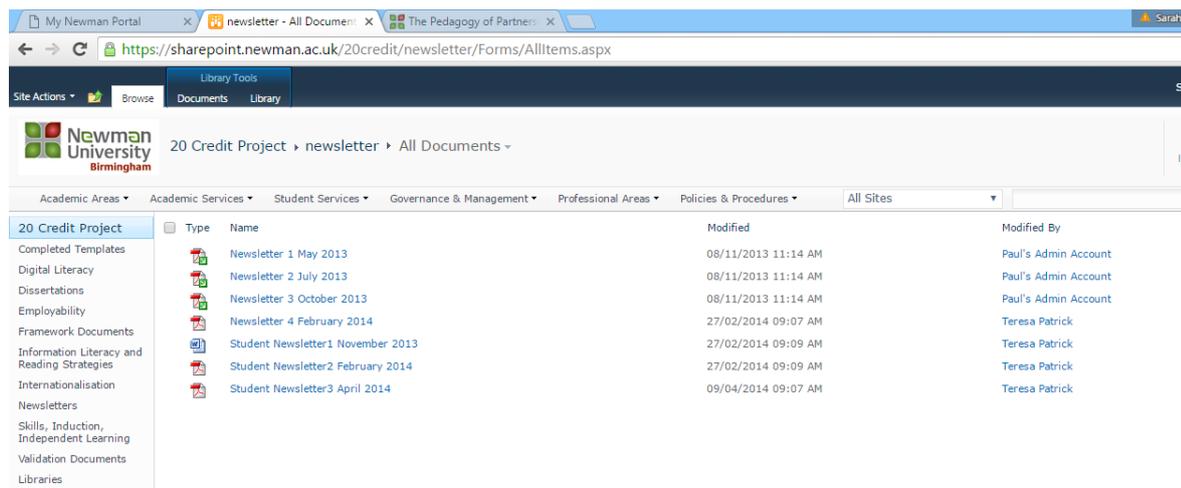
A specific projects page on the institutional repository system SharePoint (Fig. 1) was set up that enabled staff to access information relating to the *What Works?* including evaluation plans and resources.

Figure 1: Representation of the dedicated space for communication and resources re: *What Works?* project on institutional repository



It also provided a link between *What Works?1* and the development of the 20-credit framework (Fig. 2). Indeed, a whole section of SharePoint was dedicated to the 20-credit project containing newsletters, examples of effective practice and validation information.

Figure 2: Representation of dedicated space for communication and resources re: 20-credit project on institutional repository



4. Evaluation strategy

4.1 Approach to evaluation

Newman sought to evaluate impact at an overall level to help determine the extent to which a number of institutional and disciplinary actions moved the institution nearer to achieving the overarching aims of the project. The evaluation at the institutional and discipline levels have enabled the institution to say in broad terms whether the actions have had a neutral, positive or negative effect.

4.1.1 Evaluation at the institutional level

The evaluation strategy at the institutional level focused on three key areas. Activities within these areas sought to make improvements as detailed below:

i. Promoting cohort identity to improve student progression.

Newman aimed to improve student non-continuation of study after the first year through supporting the development and implementation of a 20-credit framework for programme design for courses in the new portfolio. Involvement in *What Works?2* influenced the design of a consistent structure for programme design across the institution that built on Phase one of *What Works?* suggesting a centralisation of the academic sphere to promote student success. Staff development workshops and supporting resources were provided that introduced the findings of *What Works?1*, and encouraged staff to work across professional and academic spheres to embed academic practice development into their programmes. These activities and the framework itself asked course teams to rethink programme design with a holistic view of student transition as it relates to key points throughout the student lifecycle.

Newman tentatively evaluated the success of implementation by the number of programmes successfully completing validation during 2013/14 in readiness for 2014/15 entry and the framework itself by the number of students with re-sits at level four in cohorts 14/15 and 15/16 alongside non-continuation after the first year.

ii. Generating awareness of issues relating to progression and success of students.

A variety of activities took place looking at regulations, institutional processes and availability of data. Some of these activities were explicitly part of the *What Works?* project (e.g. data availability relation to cohort progression) and others were not (e.g. reducing final stage appeals from BME students) but were nonetheless intertwined with this second aim of the project and thus was seen as mutually beneficial. This sought to generate greater awareness of student progression issues through instigating institutional transformation that enhanced understanding of their behaviour thus enabling better student progression. Evidence of impact included collating data about students at final stage appeals; advancement in monitoring student engagement as reported to learning and teaching committee and targeted intervention on those exhibiting low engagement.

iii. Staff formation and development

Involvement in *What Works?2* did not include construction of the APU rather it focused on ensuring the Unit took into account the aims of the project, embedding these in activities going forward. The APU has thus provided a balance between developing excellence in learning and teaching, enhancing the student experience and excellence in research and scholarship. The initial success of the APU has been evaluated by measuring the number of staff with HEA accreditation alongside advancing steps to reward staff from across different institutional domains for excellence in learning and teaching and enhancing the student experience. Such evidence demonstrates a commitment to building staff capacity for engendering student belonging as outlined in the *What Works?* model.

4.1.2 Evaluation at the discipline level

i. WWCYPF

Integrating professional support into timetabled sessions and offering mentoring opportunities was instigated to encourage early intervention where needed. It was intended that evidence of re-sit patterns and interactions with student support would be useful in evaluating the behaviour of students in relation to their confidence in asking for help. This was seen as a potential indication of the development of their identity as successful learners in HE.

ii. ITE (Primary)

Changes to activities provided at induction engaged students in a period of reflection, and were designed to support successful completion of school experience thus fulfilling their aspiration to teach. Evidence of this was gathered from Mahara, Student Staff Consultative Committee meetings and Tutor feedback; Exam Board statistics and Academic Professional Tutor records. This ascertained the level of improved engagement and belonging through a better understanding in students of the university processes, alongside building positive relationships between staff and students.

iii. EMPP in combination

The introduction of seminars specifically discussing academic and pastoral issues in groups were designed to engage students by making the learning experience relevant to them, thus improving continuation from level 4-5 as outlined in phase 1 of the *What works?* programme. The attitudes of EMPP students towards their studies, and their experiences of being on a combined programme with EMPP were evaluated via focus groups and tutor tracking to understand how students identify themselves as learners in HE, and where they feel they belong.

5 Changes implemented at the institutional level

5.1 Curriculum Development: A Transitions Framework for Programme Design

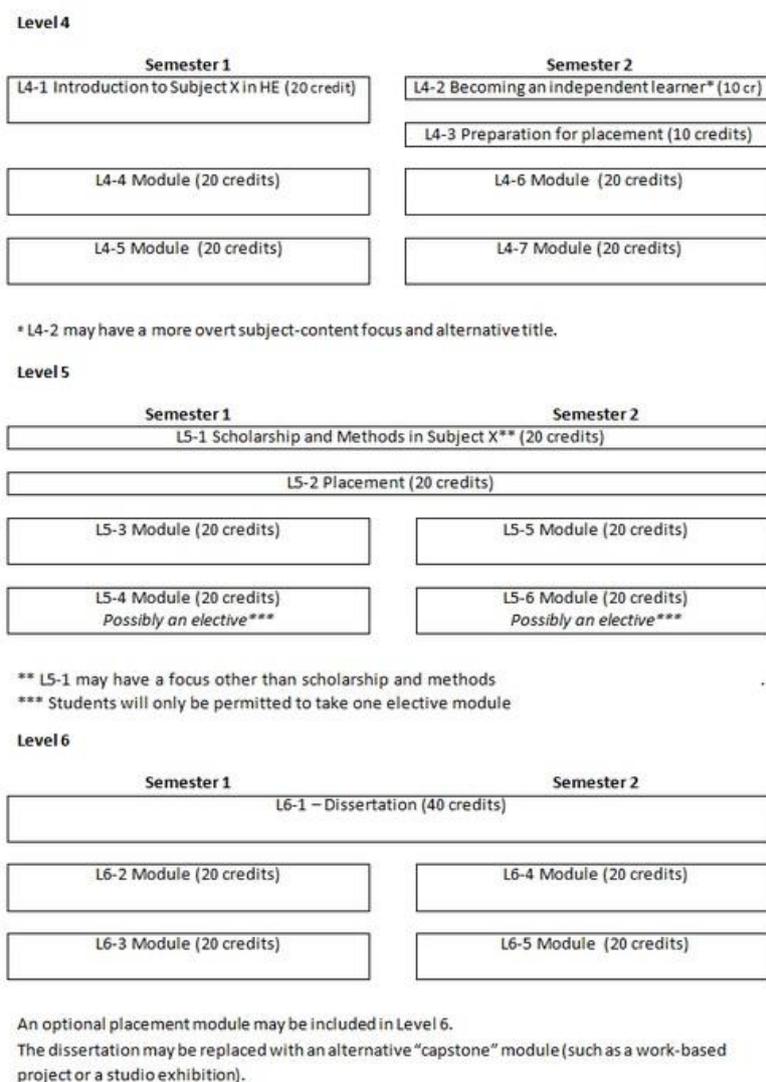
Newman's renewed portfolio with explicit programme coherence was the cornerstone of efforts to improve non-continuation after the first year through promoting cohort identity. Involvement in *What Works?2* sought to influence the construction of a framework for programme design that supported transition into and successful progression through Higher Education. Fundamental to development of the framework was an internal Academic Practice Fellowship (2012/13) preceding Newman's involvement in *What Works?2* that drew on notions of a 'transition pedagogy' (Kift and Nelson, 2005). This is now seen as a coherent element of programme design and validation at Newman as enacted through the 20-credit framework which contains key moments of transition that aim to build student capacity as detailed in Figure 3.

The formulation of a compulsory level four, semester one module within the framework was designed to extend induction into semester one of the first year. This module both underpins and unites the other modules studied at Level 4 but is not a generic skills module having a discipline focus. Whilst it may develop some discipline specific skills, it may also have some synoptic elements drawing on discipline material covered in other modules. Leading up to that module, the timetabling of Induction was developed to include increased subject contact and activities.

Subject areas are now expected to consider the ways in which they developed belonging in new students to their subject by making changes in Induction to promote cohort identity. Additional changes to the week required all staff to deliver more interactive sessions relating to regulations and support mechanisms. Subject areas were also required to consider how they support transition throughout the programme via the introduction of other compulsory modules at each level that support independent learning, research methodology and culminate in a capstone module.

The Framework and experiences of working within it are discussed further within the case study, *A Curriculum Framework to Support Transitions*. This focuses most heavily on the transition from school or college into higher education and includes three vignettes from subjects across the University describing the particular approaches that were taken to support students making this transition

Figure 3: the 20-credit Framework



Adherence to the framework is achieved through the validation process. Explicit modular codes (401,501,601) indicate what they should contain thus allowing validation panels to assess how they meet fundamental requirements of them within the framework. The validation of new programmes acts as a quality mark on programme construction in line with the framework.

5.1.1 Evidence of impact or significance of institutional level changes

Internal analysis presented to Senate in March 2016 (Newman, 2016b) is encouraging, and suggests that implementation of the 20-credit framework across levels four and five has had a positive effect on student progression.

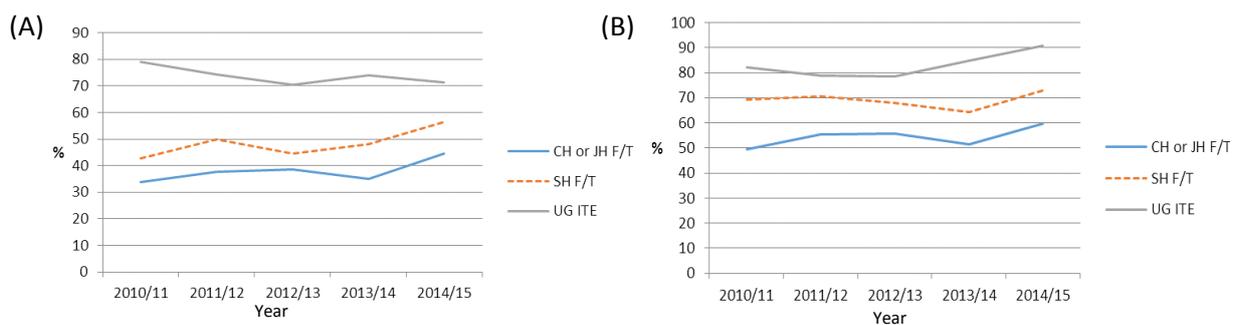
The extent of this will be borne out over the coming years with the 2016/17 graduating cohort being of particular interest: this will be the first cohort having progressed through an entire 20-credit programme and thus, will allow further deliberation on the impact of this change. Newman's latest completion rate (derived from HESA table T5) is 73.3% and relates to the 2012/13 entry cohort – many of whom completed their degree in summer 2015. It will be useful to compare this to 2016/17 completion rates to ascertain emergent patterns relating to the number of students graduating with the same level of qualification of original registration.

Non-continuation of full time students after the first year however, remains an area for further work where neither the portfolio review nor the 20-credit framework appear to have had a positive effect.

i. Student Progression

Figure 4 shows an increase in the proportion of level four students passing at the first attempt (A) and a smaller increase passing after re-sits (B). 55% (n=378) of students passed the academic year first time in 2014/15 compared to 47% (n=326) in 2013/14, and reverses the slightly downward trend for the previous three years. 17% (n=115) of students passed after re-sits 2014/15 compared to 15% (n=106) in the previous year. Whilst we cannot make an explicit causal link between implementation of the 20-credit structure in 2014/15 and improved progression, there appears to be an emergent correlation between the two.

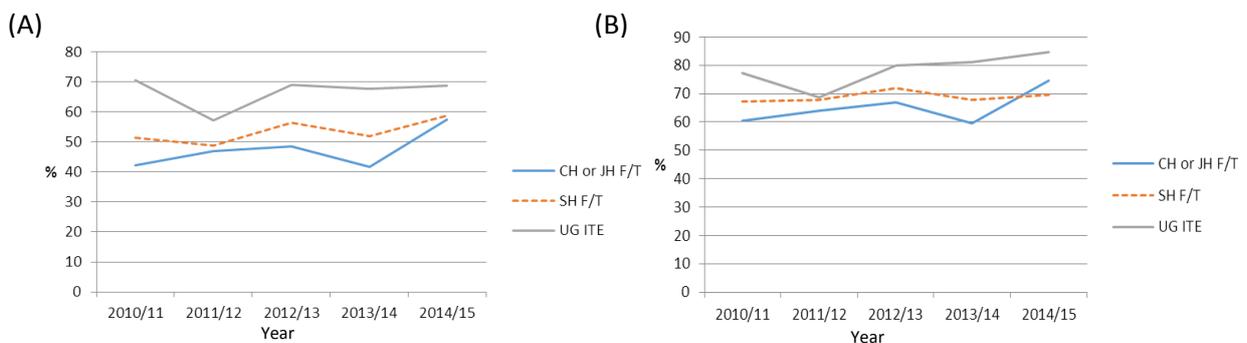
Figure 4: Percentage comparison of the percentage of level four students on each undergraduate programme passing first time (A) and after resits (B) for the past five years.



Key: CH or JH FT – Full Time Joint Honours programmes | SH F/T – Single Honours Full Time | UG ITE – Undergraduate Initial Teacher Education

Although evaluation of the 20-credit project involved level four progression, it is interesting to note that there has been a similar pattern in progression through data analysed relating to level five students. Figure five below shows that in 2014/15 there was a noticeable increase in the proportion of level five students passing at the first attempt, from 52% (n=274) in 2013/14 to 60% (n=336) in 2014/15.

Figure 5: Percentage comparison of the percentage of level five students on each undergraduate programme passing first time (A) and after resits (B) for the past five years.



Key: CH or JH FT – Full Time Joint Honours programmes | SH F/T – Single Honours Full Time | UG ITE – Undergraduate Initial Teacher Education

ii. Non-continuation after the first year of study

Newman continues to be above the benchmark for non-continuation rates as defined by HESA, though these have remained relatively static for the University as a whole in 2012/13 and 2013/14 at around 10.4% (see Fig.7 below). However, as shown in Fig. 6 Newman saw a rise in non-continuation amongst mature students from 6.6% in 2011/12 to 18.6% in 2012/13 potentially (though anecdotally) explained by external factors as alluded to in section 1.2.

Figure 6: Non-continuation of fulltime first degree mature entrants following year of entry

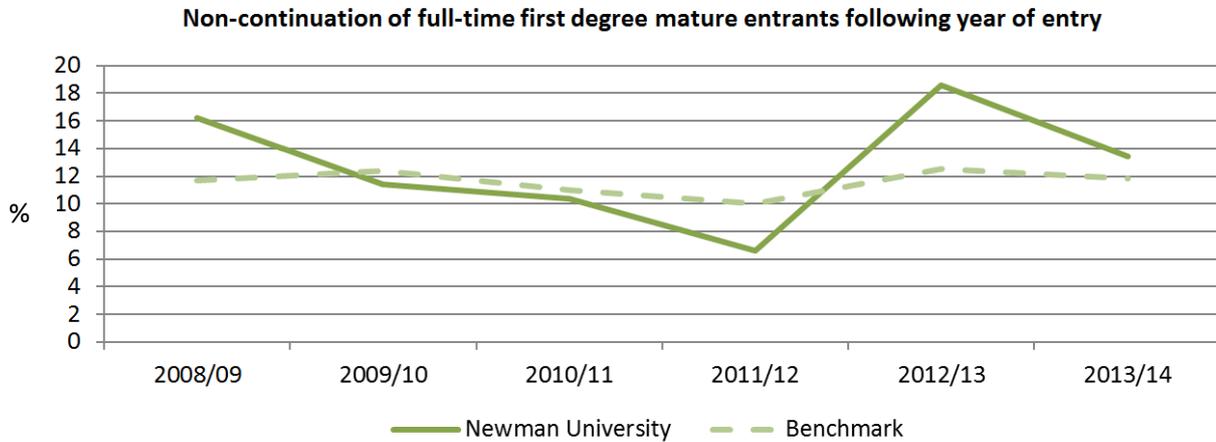
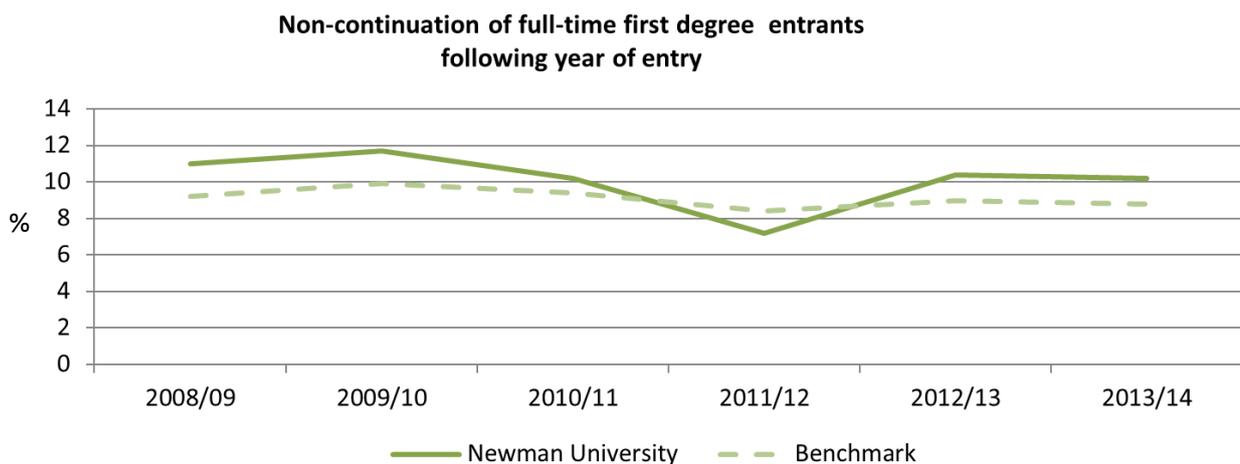


Figure 7: Non-continuation of all full time first degree entrants following year of entry



Interventions therefore appear to have had no impact on non-continuation rates after the first year. Some early work investigating the relationship between little or no interaction with university virtual systems (such as the Virtual Learning Environment and Institutional Portal) within the first six weeks of study and academic withdrawal has highlighted a correlation between the two. Moving forwards, Newman aims to utilise learner analytics to identify such students much earlier in the academic year, enabling more proactive intervention.

5.2 Strategy Development: Enabling Student Progression via the Public Sector Equality Duty (12-16)

As part of the Public Sector Equality Duty (2012-2016) the University committed itself to improving progression and success of students. This was targeted at reducing the number of male black and minority ethnic students who appeared at the final stage of the appeals process along with academic withdrawal decisions at Programme Assessment boards (PAB). These commitments were drawn from analysis of appeals with particular regard to enforced withdrawals due to poor academic profiles arising from the three Programme Assessment Boards per year. This included reviewing breakdowns across protected characteristics to understand who appeals at the Review and Final Appeal stages. A series of vignettes from this review were then reported to Equality and Diversity committee and evidenced the diverse and complex support needs of students. Moreover, they informed how the appeals process could be improved and the potential for a joining up of policy and practice for example, linking disciplinary and plagiarism issues with issues of withdrawal.

In response and over the last three years, the means by which information is shared across staff groups as well as between staff and students have been expanded. In particular, awareness raising activities regarding student support have been improved, such as Mental Health week, taking place during those first crucial months of the academic year. Students are also given more interactive introductions to student support departments during induction and throughout the first semester that aim to destigmatise and demystify support processes such as Mitigating Circumstances. Along with institution-wide improvements to disseminate support opportunities, the semester one fundamental module at level four within the new 20-credit framework has provided opportunities for staff to introduce and discuss support mechanisms. Indeed, learning support has seen an increase in requests for in-subject sessions, raising awareness of support available whilst also offering practical help with study.

5.2.1 Evidence of impact or significance of institutional level changes

Reports on Newman’s performance in relation to the Public Sector Equality Duty (2012-16) are encouraging in relation to the performance of black and minority ethnic students despite the limited effect on withdrawal rates. In broad terms, this has had a positive effect in terms of progression and retention with further work to be completed around withdrawal going forward in particular, the number of students graduating at the same level of original registration.

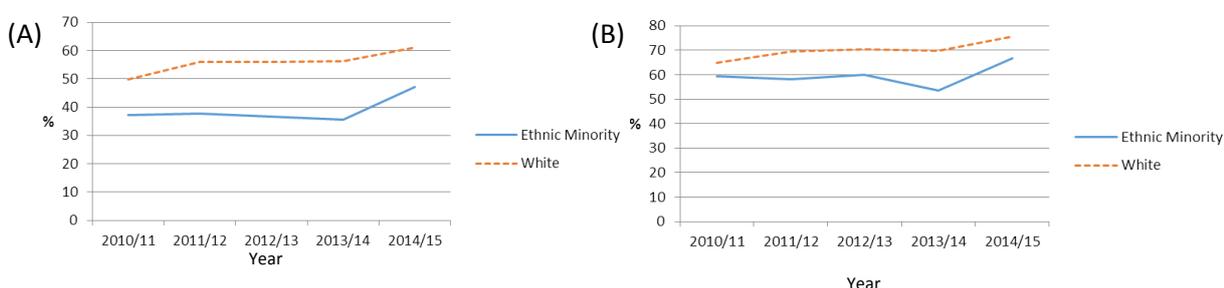
i. Student withdrawal

Despite an increase in academic withdrawal at the PAB in 2013/14, awareness raising of issues and a review of the appeals process can be correlated to a reduction in PAB withdrawal decisions across all programmes since 2011/12. It is difficult however to ascertain the impact on self-withdrawals as this figure has been inconsistently measured.

ii. Student progression by ethnicity

Alongside the progression across programme cohorts (Fig. 4 and 5), there has been a significant increase in the proportion of ethnic minority students at level four passing first time: 47% (n=136) in 2014/15 compared to 35% (n=104) in 2013/14 (Fig.9). There has also been a significant increase in the proportion of ethnic minority students passing after resits compared to the previous year: 67% (n=193) in 2014/15 compared to 54% (n=157) in 2013/14. This is very positive considering that the percentage had fallen by six percentage points in 2013/14. There has also been a significant improvement each year in the proportion of ethnic minority students passing after resits compared to the proportion that passed first time. Most recently, in 2014/15 there was a 20 percentage point increase in the proportion of ethnic minority Year 1 students passing after resits (i.e. from 47% to 67%).

Figure 9: Progression of students completing level four first time (A) and after re-sits (B) by ethnicity.



iii. Student appeals by ethnicity and awareness raising

A review of the University’s appeals process and awareness raising can be viewed as having a positive effect on student progression. Over the course of Newman’s involvement in *What Works?* there has been a 37.5% reduction in final stage appeals, and an overall 16% reduction achieved in review stage appeals with over a 50% reduction in final stage appeals from students in Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups.

5.3 Staff (& Student) Development: Construction of the Academic Practice Unit (APU)

The construction of an APU was one of the aims of the *What Works?2* project though precisely how this would be set up fell outside of the project's remit. The APU was established in early 2014 to support staff formation, particularly as this acts to support the formation of students. This has been realised particularly through Students as Partners projects (see 5.3.1 ii), which has been a major innovation of the APU.

Further partnership and collaborative approaches to academic staff development include:

- growing research and scholarly activity through development of writing retreat provision and coffee and papers sessions;
- the development of a University Post Graduate Certificate and Continuing Professional Development pathway to provide a particular Newman, values-based approach to academic development;
- course development provision to bring course teams together with key experts to work on enhancement themes;
- development of the University's policy and practice of flexible learning;
- learning and teaching conference and workshops for sharing effective practice(s).

5.3.1 Evidence of impact or significance of institutional level changes

The APU can be seen to have had a positive effect on building staff capacity that works to enable connections between staff and students to promote a sense of belonging. Although not directly falling into the remit of the *What Works?2* project, the influence of the project within the APU can be seen in the following activities:

i. Funded retention projects

In 2015, Newman University successfully applied to receive funding from the HEA's *Vice Chancellors Excellence Initiative for Retention & Achievement*. This has included extensive statistical analysis that shows for Newman University, the biggest factor in student progression and success is the subject studied, followed by disclosed disability (excluding dyslexia and other learning differences) and then ethnicity (Newman, 2016c). Subsequently, and in response to this analysis, seven retention and achievement-focused Students as Partners projects are currently underway, and due to report in June 2016.

ii. Students as Partners initiative

In 2014/15, 16 Students as Partners (SAP)/Research Partners (SRAP) projects were completed with several addressing inclusion issues e.g. decolonisation of the Education curriculum.

- 23 students took part across ten SAP projects. The majority of participants were female with more than half from a BME background. Feedback suggests that such partnership projects provide a way to engage with enhancing the student experience which are more attractive to some key BME constituencies than engagement via the Students' Union. Projects included evaluations of the inclusivity of the first year experience; a community action project; ways of making learning, teaching and assessment more inclusive for disabled students; developing further support to help students learn from feedback; and an exploration of the Muslim student experience at a Catholic University.
- Five SAP projects have been accepted for 2015/16 and include mature student provision in Theology at Newman; developing a subject assessment strategy across programmes in English; running writing retreats for creative writing students; refreshing the preparatory activities and information given to Freshers prior to entry and supporting EAL students on Early Childhood Education and Care programmes.
- 13 students completed SRAP projects that engaged students in research within their disciplines.

iii. Formal staff development

- In July 2015, the HEA accredited an internal Post Graduate Certificate in Higher Education Practice. This programme aligns itself to the UKSPF that recognises participant ability to reflect on their teaching practice(s) through engagement with learning and teaching theory.

- Newman has increased the number of academic and professional staff with HEA accreditation at the appropriate level, with more than 50% staff at Newman accredited which is well above the national average.
- The number of Senior Fellows at Newman University has increased from three in 2012/13 to nine in 2015/16.

6 Changes implemented at the discipline level and impact

6.1 Education and Multi-Professional Practice in combination: Co-curricular

To develop peer relationships within joint honours programmes, students were grouped together with peers studying the same combination in three of modules at level four. This encourages peer-to-peer and student-to-tutor discussion regarding specific challenges, both pastoral and academic, potentially of specific concern to their subject combination. This provides further opportunity for staff to get to know their students better, and for the students to build relationships with each other and thus generate a sense of belonging. The module is an opportunity to focus discussions between staff and students on the academic practices needed, in tandem with basic educational concepts, in order to be successful.

6.1.2 Evidence of impact or significance of discipline level changes

Further discussion of this intervention can be found in the case study *How 'Doing theory in Education' can lead to increased student retention and success*. This examines how the module *Doing Theory in Education* has contributed to students' capacity to become successful and engaged learners in higher education, helping to increase student retention. A range of approaches were used, such as discussions, the use of an online forum and visiting speakers to enable the students to develop a critical approach to the theorization of Education as a field of undergraduate study. It looks to evaluate the impact of the approaches employed in the module and the effect that it has had on the students' progress and attainment throughout their course.

Additionally, Education studies is now the subject most studied as a joint honours running courses with nine other subjects from across the institution. Figure five shows that progression for combined honours at level four has improved significantly, with it likely that this module has positively supported student progression.

6.2 Working with Children, Young People and Families: Co-curricular

The BA WWCYPF at Newman University recruits a very diverse student cohort in terms of age, previous educational background/experience and cultural background. This includes a number of students with migrant backgrounds who are studying in what may be their second or third language but who do not receive additional support to meet their specific needs. It was identified that the programme had a relatively large number of students who required resit opportunities during the first year and it was the view of the course team and students that this related to students not being familiar with the often hidden 'rules of engagement' around academic writing and presentation. The intervention therefore was designed to work with students in making the 'rules' more explicit from early in their programme.

The course team had already undertaken a process of reviewing the curriculum in 2011 to try and identify Threshold Concepts (see Meyer and Land, 2003) which were considered central to student learning (Monk *et al*, 2012). As a result of rethinking of the curriculum, an extended induction programme which covered the whole of the first week of the programme, was introduced in an attempt to support students in developing a clearer understanding of some of the key concepts to be covered during the first year. This also included sessions which introduced ideas around academic skills such as identifying appropriate sources, academic writing and critical thinking. These sessions were followed up with 'refresher' sessions at points in the first semester which coincided with early assignment setting. The induction programme ran in various forms between 2011 and 2013 and at a time when an institutional decision to restructure programmes and timetables meant that it was no longer possible to run the induction in the same way. It needs to be noted that the extended induction was a project the subject team had been seeking to develop prior to the formal intervention which became part of this project.

The extended induction involved the whole of the WWCYPF team together with the subject librarian and colleagues from the learning support services. The inclusion of the library and support staff was deemed to be particularly important because it was hoped that this would lead to students making greater use of the support available, and follows the *What Works?* model (Thomas, 2012) of incorporating the work of professional staff within the academic sphere to promote retention and success. It was based around using a theme (e.g. the so called 'riots' in 2011 and 2012) which it was hoped would engage students and provide a context for introducing how to think in a social scientific way. The whole of the students' academic timetable for the first week of their programme was used for the induction and sessions focussed on how to 'problematize' issues from a social science perspective; how to identify and evaluate sources alongside how to develop/structure arguments.

Following the intervention, the course team noted both a reduction in the number of students failing assessments and an increase in students self-referring to learning support during the academic year. Re-sit rates reduced from 23% in 2012/13 to 10% in 2013/14 as seen in Figure Nine. Student feedback obtained through focus groups revealed that they felt that the approach taken was both positive and supportive and that it did help to demystify some of the expectations. In the words of one of the students, who took part, '*it helped me to settle a bit.... to feel a bit less worried about what I had to do*'. It is of course, difficult to attribute the changes in resit numbers to the intervention in any systematic way given the inevitable variations between the academic performance of different cohorts however, in broad terms, it appears that this has had a positive effect on student progression and success.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to repeat the intervention in 2014/15 as the University decided to revalidate its entire undergraduate portfolio and move to 20-credit modules. Some of the characteristics and approaches were nevertheless incorporated into the design of level four modules within the new programme, with ongoing improvements in the progression of students in level four and onto level five.

It was originally intended to develop the approach by recruiting third year students who would be prepared to act as mentors to first year students as part of a work-related learning module, undertaking a 'placement' within the programme. The role here would have to be to act as a mentor to first year students and to look at the development of resources to support students during the first year of their studies. However, this did not prove popular with third year students as they felt it didn't relate sufficiently closely with their career aspirations (despite the fact that the majority of students go on to work or further study in education or social work/care contexts). Students preferred to undertake placements in settings they saw as more directly focussed on their anticipated career direction; schools, refuges, community projects etc. This part of the project therefore had to be abandoned.

Overall, the course team felt this was a useful intervention which promoted positive relationships between staff and students and dialogue around the development of academic skills. Nonetheless the fact that it was only possible to run the intervention in its full form on a single occasion makes it difficult to draw any definitive conclusions.

6.2.1 Evidence of impact or significance of discipline level changes

Figure 10: Resit numbers and rates in Single honours WWCYPF from 12/13 to 14/15.

	12/13		13/14		14/15	
Total cohort	51 (FT&PT)		60 (FT&PT)		27 (FT & PT)	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Pass First Time	8	23	31	52	14	52
Pass following Re-sit	12	23	6	10	4	15
Re-sit still needed	13	25	14	23	3	11
Suspended	2	4	2	3	0	0
Withdrawn	4	8	7	12	6	22
Transferred Out	3	6	0	0	0	0

6.3 Initial Teacher Education: Induction

A new approach to student induction and enrolment as a whole has been taken alongside activities designed to support the effective transition into, and completion of, school experience. This is supplemented by a pre-20-credit restructure module in 'Professional Studies Academic Learning (PSAL)' at level four in semester one designed to incorporate activities that develop both elements of practice needed to be successful in teaching. The principles of this module were transferred across to the new TEI 401 transition module *Ground Rules for Membership of a Scholarly Community* within the 20-credit framework as well as integrated into the pre School Experience briefings.

As well as supporting those students starting at level four, the programme now provides a 'Refresher' event for those students returning to study from a period of absence that included meeting with the programme leader prior to re-commencing the course. Student workshops in school experience together with three compulsory targeted post-SE411 and SE511 workshops were provided within professional studies modules.

6.3.1 Evidence of impact or significance of discipline level changes

Further discussion of this intervention and impact can be found in the *Interrupted but not impeded: Interventions to support trainee progress on Undergraduate BA Honours with recommendation for Qualified Teacher Status courses* case study. Here, the intervention is described as having a positive effect on success and retention rates and increased engagement of 'interrupted' students.

7 Sustainability

7.1 A Transitions Framework for Programme Design

The University's involvement in *What Works?2* was seen as a vehicle by which to support change already afoot, such as the move to a 20-credit modular structure. The 20-credit framework is now embedded and accepted as the overarching University standard for programme design whilst remaining malleable to meet discipline specific needs, such as professional accreditation. Work at Newman within the *What Works?2* project was instrumental in ensuring that the framework was informed by *What Works?1*; and that new programmes being validated, and subsequent revalidations, will have to show how they are taking this forward.

a. Promoting democratic engagement, meaningful dialogue and co-operative working

Involvement in Phase Two of *What Works?* has resulted in further institutional dialogue around issues relating to retention, progression and success and in particular the approaches employed as work continues in this area. Establishment of the APU and its commitment to the pedagogy of partnership has embedded collaborative working with students, as demonstrated by the success of the 'Students as Partners' programme. This work simultaneously builds student and staff capacity through collaboration that acknowledges students as co-investigators and developers of our university learning community (Newman University, 2016).

b. Learning Analytics

The greatest impact is perhaps yet to be realised as the University moves towards utilising learner analytics through piloting this in three discipline areas. Led by the *What Works?* project lead, in January 2016 Newman University completed a 'Readiness Assessment for Learning Analytics' as part of a JISC project in 2015/16 that is looking to provide a sector-wide solution (See JISC, 2015). Newman's involvement here is viewed as facilitating pro-active monitoring of students thus enabling earlier intervention by a range of academic and support staff. This in and of itself is a huge undertaking for the University, and proposes a further transformation in institutional behaviour. However, the confidence to effectively co-ordinate and contribute to this derives from the lessons learnt through involvement in phase two of *What Works?* Thus, a will to develop and implement learning analytics has been fed by the University's involvement in the project.

8 Conclusions

8.1 Summary

The construction of a framework for programme design, underpinned by a transition pedagogy that supports student formation is a major success for Newman University, having necessarily involved a large volume of work from a range of staff, students and external contributors. The APU's work regarding partnership work has realised the intricate connections between staff and student formation.

A challenge for the University now is how it maintains the impetus for Induction to continue to develop ways to support belonging and promote cohort identity particularly when responsibility for the organisation of the week is not specifically allocated within a staff job role at Newman. The first six weeks at University are known to be key in helping establish positive peer-to-peer and student-to-staff relationships. Therefore, oversight of the organisation of academic activities held during Induction - including statutory enrolment procedures – should be part of a leadership role within each academic school to maintain continuity and focus.

There have been many external changes to governmental policy that potentially affect the extent to which activities within *What Works?2* can be successful. Indeed, alterations to Disabled Students Allowance, and proposed changes to Student Grants and Loans will no doubt impact on the ability of students attracted to Newman to be successful. Continued restructuring of the welfare system will also affect students but similarly staff who teach on programmes preparing students for careers in an increasingly privatised public services sector are also affected. How the University works to enable progression and success of students from backgrounds traditionally excluded from higher education will most likely become more complex and resource intensive.

The importance of internal dissemination in a change project as complex as the 20-credit framework cannot be understated – communication is needed in all directions through a range of fora to prevent thinking in silos and promote inter-disciplinary along with inter-departmental discussions. Such fora need to be able to cross hierarchal boundaries to ensure that all elements due to be disrupted as part of the change process are discussed, and all voices heard.

8.2 Next Steps

The culmination of *What Works?2* does not mean the end of work relating to student progression and success for Newman University. As part of the *Vice Chancellor's Strategic Enhancement Initiative*, Newman successfully applied for 15,000 pounds of HEA funding to undertake student partnership developments in 2015-16 to enhance retention, progression and achievement as highlighted in section 5.3. Managed by the APU, this draws on existing learning from analysis of institutional research data, partnership projects and *What Works?* The intentions of this project will be to continue the University's drive to reduce non-continuation at the end of year one, reduce the current attainment gap between BME and other students and to reduce the attainment gap between students from other entry routes and A-level entry. Consultation workshops are also underway to drive forward a Retention and Success strategy for the University that will bring together activities across the institution together to provide a coherent approach.

Evaluation of the 20-credit project will include monitoring non-continuation and resit levels into 16/17 (this is the first cohort having completed 20-credit modules) to illuminate emergent patterns.

9 References

Callender, C. and Jackson, J. (2005) *Does the fear of debt deter students from higher education?* Journal of social policy, 34 (4). pp. 509-540. Available at: [http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/21010/2/Does_the_fear_of_debt_deter_students_from_higher_education_\(LSERO\).pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/21010/2/Does_the_fear_of_debt_deter_students_from_higher_education_(LSERO).pdf) (accessed 15.11.2015)

Department for Education (2013) *2010 to 2015 Government Policy: teaching and school leadership*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2010-to-2015-government-policy-teaching-and-school-leadership> (accessed 20.07.15)

Harrison, N., Chudry, F., Waller, R. and Hatt, S. (2015) 'Towards a typology of debt attitudes among contemporary young UK undergraduates', *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 39(1), 85-107.

Jones, R. and Thomas, L., (2005) 'The 2003 UK government higher education white paper: a critical assessment of its implications for the access and widening participation agenda', *Journal of Education Policy*, 20:5, p 615–30.

Freire, P. (1996), *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 2nd Ed., London: Penguin books

Higher Education Statistics Agency, (2016) PIs: Non-continuation rates (including projected outcomes) (tables T3, T4, T5). Available at: http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2064&Itemid=141

JISC, (2015) *Effective learning analytics: Helping further and higher education organisations to analyse and understand their data*. Available from: <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/rd/projects/effective-learning-analytics> (accessed 20.04.15)

Meyer, J. and Land, R. (2003) 'Threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge: linkages to ways of thinking and practising' in *Enhancing Teaching-Learning Environments in Undergraduate Courses*, ETL Project, Occasional Report 4, May 2003 . Available at: <http://www.etl.tla.ed.ac.uk/docs/ETLreport4.pdf> (accessed 20.05.14)

Moffat, S., Lawson, S., Patterson, R., Holding, E., Dennison, A., Sowden, S., Brown, J. (2015) 'A qualitative study of the impact of the UK 'bedroom tax'', *Journal of Public Health*. Available at: <http://jpubhealth.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2015/03/13/pubmed.fdv031.full> (accessed 27.11.15)

Monk, C., Cleaver, E., Hyland, C. and Brotherton, G. (2012) *Nurturing the independent-thinking practitioner: using threshold concepts to transform undergraduate learning*, *Journal of Pedagogic Development*, Volume 2.3, p10-16.

Newman University (2016) *The Pedagogy of Partnership*. Available at: <http://www.newman.ac.uk/about-us/3931/the-pedagogy-of-partnership> (accessed 10.01.16)

Newman University (2016b), *2014/15 Student success & completion analysis*. Internal document.

Newman University (2016c), *HEA Vice-Chancellor's Strategic Initiative: Enhancing retention, progression and achievement through student partnership*. Internal document.

Newman University (2015) *Access Agreement 2016/17*. Available at: <https://www.offa.org.uk/agreements/Newman%20University%201617.pdf> (accessed 21.01.16)

Newman University (2014) *Strategic Plan 2014-2020*. Available at: <http://www.newman.ac.uk/files/w3/about-us/pdf/Strategic%20Plan%202014-2020%20.pdf?q=277> (accessed 17.03.16)

Nursaw Associates (2015) 'What do we know about the impact of financial support on access and student success? Review of the research and evaluation of the impact of institutional financial support on access and student success', *Report to the Office for Fair Access (OFFA)*. Available at: <https://www.offa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Literature-review-PDF.pdf> (accessed 04.10.15)

Parliament. House of Commons (2012) *Welfare Reform Act (2012, c.5)*. London: The Stationery Office. Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2012/5/contents/enacted/data.htm> (accessed 31.07.15)

Thomas, L. (2012) *Building student engagement and belonging in Higher Education at a time of change: Final report from the What Works? Student Retention & Success programme*. Available at: <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resource/building-student-engagement-and-belonging-higher-education-time-change-final-report-what> (accessed 24.03.16)

Thomas, L. and May, H. (2011) 'Student engagement to improve retention and success model' in Thomas, L., and Jamieson- Ball, C. (eds) *Engaging students to improve student retention and success in higher education in Wales, Higher Education Academy* [online]. Available at: https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/engagingstudentstoimproveretention_final_english.pdf (accessed 24.03.16).

Appendices

1. A Curriculum Framework to Support Transitions

Duncan Lawson, Kate Katafiasz, Helen Cousins and Laura Healy,
Newman University.

Background to the case study

In 2012, Newman University's Academic Board took two major (and related) decisions. The first was to undertake a review of the undergraduate portfolio with a view to reducing the large number of combined honours degrees that were theoretically available but were, in practice, chosen by a very limited number of students (if indeed by any). The second was to move the undergraduate courses from the existing 15 credit structure to a 20 credit framework. In the words of one Council member, this created a task equivalent to 're-engineering the whole aircraft whilst it was in flight'.

Given the rarity of such wholesale change, it was important for the University to take the opportunities presented by such far reaching revision to develop considerably enhanced courses, rather than simply re-packaging existing courses through a so-called 'slice and dice' approach. In order to ensure that the opportunities did not pass the University by, it was decided that the University would adopt a common framework designed to support students in making transitions throughout their learning journeys, in particular the transitions from school or college into higher education; the transition into becoming an independent learner responsible for the production of a substantial individual piece of academic work and the transition out of the University into employment, further study or other activity.

The Case Study will describe the final framework pointing out how / where these transitions are supported by the structure of the course design. In addition, three vignettes from subjects across the University are presented which focus on the transition into higher education and the development of students as independent learners.

The 20 Credit Framework

In order to develop a common framework for the new courses, a working group with representation from across the University was established. This group drew on particular expertise of other individuals from across the University at appropriate times in the development of the framework. Implicit in the framework was the need to "recognise the importance of nurturing a culture of belonging" (Thomas, 2012, p.69) from the outset.

The University operates a semester system and so, with 20 credit building blocks, a full-time course can be constructed from three 20 credit modules per semester. One of the basic principles that was enshrined in the new framework was that all full-time students, no matter what course they were taking, would study 60 credits per semester. This was in stark contrast to practice under the previous 15 credit combined honours framework, where in order to fit in some of the combinations students wished to study, imbalanced study programmes of six (15 credit) modules one semester followed by two in the next were not uncommon (and occasionally even 7:1 splits occurred).

The framework identified two types of modules which became known as 'fundamental' and 'expansive' modules. Fundamental modules were compulsory in every course – including joint honours courses. At Level 4, there are forty credits of such modules (20 in each semester). In semester 1, the fundamental module was given the meta-title of "An introduction to studying subject X in higher education", whilst in semester 2 there were two, separate 10 credit modules "Becoming an independent learner in subject X" and "Preparation for placement".

A key characteristic of these modules is that they were not to be generic study skills modules but were to be firmly grounded in the subject being studied ("subject X"). These modules would however promote the development of study skills appropriate to the subject through actually studying the subject. How this is achieved varies from subject to subject (as described in the vignettes below). These modules focus on the transition from school/college into higher education and the transition to becoming an independent learner.

The module “Preparation for placement” built on the University’s commitment to and reputation for developing employability skills. Whilst appearing generic (in the sense that all students enrol on the same module), the workshops within this module have subject-focus. The module does precisely what it says – it prepares students for their mandatory work placement module in Level 5.

At Level 5, there are again forty credits of fundamental modules: two 20 credit modules. The first went under the meta-title of “Research methods in subject X” and the second was the Placement module. The phrase “research methods” was open to broad interpretation but one key role for this module is to prepare students for the capstone module (in most cases a 40 credit dissertation) at Level 6. In line with the importance given to employability, students on all courses are required to complete a work placement and to reflect on their learning during the placement.

At Level 6, the fundamental module is a single 40 credit capstone module requiring students to undertake a major individual piece of work. Typically, this is a traditional dissertation although other models such as an exhibition or a work-based project are used on some courses.

The 20 credit framework was introduced in September 2014 at Levels 4 and 5. Students at Level 5 had studied 15 credit modules under the old framework in the previous year. Students studying at Level 6 in 14/15 remained on the 15 credit framework. Academic year 15/16 is the first year where all levels are being delivered on the 20 credit framework and it will not be until 2017 that the University has its first graduates who have studied entirely on the 20 credit framework. Consequently it is difficult at this stage to provide data to demonstrate the impact of the framework.

Instead, we present three vignettes relating to the Level 4 fundamental modules in three subject areas (Drama, English and Sport) to illustrate approaches taken to implementing the principles of the framework.

Vignettes – Implementation of Level 4 Fundamental Modules

Vignette 1: Drama - DRU401: The Terrible Truth! Ancient Greek and early Modern Drama

This module:

- introduces selected plays from the Ancient Greek and Early Modern canon;
- explores how Tragedies and Comedies were staged (how these two early genres of drama varied and evolved); and
- begins to examine how Drama uses words and bodies in different ways.

It is assessed by group presentation to showcase students’ understanding of these three things at the end of the module.

In addition to the Drama content covered, the module introduces writing and academic research skills. Every taught session begins with a visit to the Moodle page, and an assessment of how far we have come, and what is still to be covered in the module – the ‘one step back, two steps forward’ approach. Students are familiarised with Moodle itself and the importance of online learning. The Moodle page features many links to plays and webpages to encourage students to make the process of doing their own research easy, initially. Students are encouraged to take advantage of, and enjoy, this guided research as part of their student directed time, which it is emphasised should be at least double the contact time. The difference between teaching and learning in school and college is contrasted with the more autonomous university model, where contact time is geared to stimulate students to ‘dig deeper’ in areas that are of particular personal interest outside of lectures. Students have a session with the subject librarian early in the module to show them how to use electronic resources to find links and journal articles for themselves in future. They also have sessions on academic referencing, and each group submits a correctly formatted bibliography on the day of the presentation in hard copy, without which they cannot achieve more than a bare pass.

A key feature of the module is that each ‘lecture’ is structured to introduce students to both receptive and active learning strategies, to cater to different learning styles. Sessions begin with a slide show and conventional lecture, followed by a very structured practical exploration of highlights of plays in pairs and small groups.

Students are encouraged to engage with the slide show presentations and ask questions whenever they like, but are discouraged from inappropriate behaviour such as chatting to each other, using phones, or eating.

Similarly practical workshops are taken very seriously, and used to explore how text, stage, and costume work in tandem, in both Ancient and Early Modern periods, in comparison with what we know of theatrical practices today. Students experiment with the pro and obscene (from which our word obscene derives), with the way sound and vision is choreographed, particularly in masked drama, and compare how violence and obscenity is handled differently in tragedy and comedy. Work is always shared and discussed, and students are encouraged to respect each others' work, to maintain the social health of the cohort.

In addition to on-campus session, field trips are incorporated not only to look at contemporary productions of ancient and early modern texts, but also to help construct cohort identity. There are at least two trips to Warwick Arts Centre which hosts excellent touring productions in the first semester so that first, second, and third year students can get a chance to get to know each other. Inter-year group cohort identity is also further promoted by encouraging students to watch other year groups' productions.

Vignette 2: English – ENU401: Ways of Reading I

The development of an 'extended induction' for first year students doing English was based on the What Works? Student Retention & Success model (Thomas, 2012) which suggested the importance of developing student belonging within the academic sphere. Our interpretation of 'belonging' is an academic one intended to develop students' identity as effective learners in English in HE. It was also prompted by two internal initiatives: one was the requirement in the 20-credit framework for a Semester 1 'fundamental module' focusing on how students should learn in the specific subject; the other was research carried out by lecturer in English on Induction Week across the University which indicated that students and staff needed more dedicated subject area sessions within Induction week.

In English we have developed an Induction Task, introduced to students in Induction Week and submitted in the first week of Semester 1. The information for the task is included in a block on the ENU401 Moodle site, pre-week 1 to connect it to this module, bridging between Induction Week and the first week of teaching. The task is undertaken independently by the students but it forms the basis of the students' first tutorial session (see below) also run as part of ENU401. The students have to read two extracts (from library eBooks) about 'doing English' at university, write a piece reflecting on how far those readings match their expectations, and set themselves two targets for the first three weeks of Semester 1. The primary intention of the task is to make the students access electronic and library systems, to practice electronic submission and feedback retrieval. However, what students write also creates a point of personal connection between staff and the students in their tutorial group, and provides a baseline assessment of the student's writing ability.

Students within the same programmes are organized into groups of 7-10 and allocated to one tutor within English. Some activities in Induction Week are run within tutorial groups. The tutor marks and provides feedback on the Induction Task and discussion of this forms the basis of the first group tutorial session. The tutorials (three in total) are timetabled within ENU401 to encourage attendance. Topics covered include goal-setting from feedback, reflective learning, managing revision and exams but these tutorials also provide an opportunity for students to bring issues to staff, to build staff-student relationships, and to develop subject belonging amongst students within each programme in English. Lectures and seminars in ENU401 integrate learning *about* the subject with learning *in* the subject and encourage the reflective learning practices set up by the Induction Task.

For example part of one lecture models different ways of taking notes; following this students are set a preparation task for the next seminar, to read and make notes on an extract about the literary critical practice of New Criticism; the activities for the seminar that follows include discussion of how effectively they made notes whether they tried different methods; what they understood from the reading and opportunities to practice New Criticism; they also reflect on how this matches their previous practice in active reading of literature.

Vignette 3: Sport – PEU401 Investigating Sport & Exercise

PEU401 was introduced at Newman University in September 2014. Around this time, I began employment at the institution in my first full-time lecturing position. While these facts are not linked, this reflection on my experience of leading the module is undoubtedly blurred by the eyes of a neophyte academic.

My first impressions of the module were formed through reading the module data set and from conversations with colleagues who had been involved in designing the module. From these initial views, I had to determine how would I translate the broad learning outcomes into 12 lectures and 24 seminars. I also had concerns about the links between the aims of the module, the content to be delivered, and the assessments. However, one purpose of the module seemed very clear – to help to develop the students into in(ter)dependent learners. That is, not dependent on lecturers to provide all the answers, but not so independent that they would struggle to participate in group work, or to ask relevant people (e.g. learning support tutors, academic staff, fellow students) for help and support when needed. In my opinion, this was a crucial aim of the module (one which I am not convinced was fully achieved).

Through delivering the module, I experienced several challenges. First, I found that most students did not fully engage with all the learning opportunities provided by the module. For example, attendance was often poor at lectures and seminars. Furthermore, many students did not attempt the online learning tasks provided on Moodle. A second challenge that I experienced was the progression (or lack of it) of the students. For their first assignment, an abstract of a published paper, 25% of the students failed to achieve a pass mark. A final challenge was the understanding and retention of knowledge, especially on content which was not directly assessed. Throughout these challenges, I felt that some students were not really becoming in(ter)dependent learners – they were still asking for the “right” answer, being reactive rather than proactive, and not starting to take responsibility for their own learning. As a new academic, this was something which I found difficult to deal with.

As a result of my experience leading the module last year, several changes have been made to the module. These changes have mostly arisen as possible solutions to the aforementioned challenges, with the overall aim of enhancing the module as a whole.

The first change is designed to facilitate greater engagement and attendance. This will be predominately by having more direct links between seminar and online tasks, and the assessments. For example, in one of the first seminars students will be asked to identify important skills for being successful in Higher Education, and rate their current ability in these skills. At the end of the module, they will rate their improvement in these skills and reflect upon their progress as a part of their assessment. Online tests will be provided on Moodle to serve as practice for an online assessment at the end of the module.

A further change has been to introduce a formative assignment. Given the high failure rate in the first assignment last year, the purpose of this formative assignment is to allow students to experience failure without it having implications for their progression. Students will submit an abstract on which they will receive feedback and an indicative mark. They will later be required to improve on this abstract and reflect upon their experience. It is hoped that this will help the students to understand how to use feedback to improve their work throughout their degree, and into their post-graduate experiences.

It is hoped that these changes will facilitate the students’ transition to university and encourage them to become more independent in their learning. By encouraging reflection and self-awareness, it is anticipated that students will develop the skills necessary to be successful in Higher Education.

Sustainability

This approach is sustainable since it has been adopted by the University as the framework in which all courses operate. There have already been some minor 'tweaks' to the framework in the light of the experience of one year of operating the framework. For example, originally both the Placement module and "Research Methods in Subject X" (Level 5 fundamental modules) were long thin modules (spanning both semesters). This feature was to allow flexibility in when students undertook their work placement (creating more opportunities). It did however make it difficult for students to undertake a semester's study abroad. The framework has been revised by splitting the single 20 credit "Research Methods" module into two separate (but connected) 10 credit modules, one in each semester. Within modules, as illustrated in Vignette 3, changes have also been made to improve the outcomes of the fundamental modules.

Lessons learnt

Successful transitions rarely just happen. Students are likely to be more successful if there is purposeful design of curricula to support key transition points. The University believes that such support is more effective when it is integral to the course of study, not a separate bolt-on but obviously relevant (interesting and connected) to the subject that the student is studying.

References

Thomas, L (2012) Building student engagement and belonging in Higher education at a time of change: final report from the What Works? Student Retention and Success programme, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, London.

2. Introducing E-tivities to improve student engagement and success

Helen Davies, Clare Bright, Sarah Parkes and Helen Cousins
Newman University

This case study is part of Newman University's contribution to the second phase of the Higher Education Academy (HEA) *What works? Student retention and success change programme* (hereafter referred to as the *What Works? Phase 2 project*). The approach taken in this case study acknowledges some of the findings from the *What works? Student retention and success change programme 2008-2011* which identified the benefits of a learner-centred paradigm as described by Huba and Freed (2000, cited in Thomas, 2012, p.36). This can be described as a 'more active learning approach and includes group learning, engaging activities, feedback and formative assessment, defined by Hockings (2010) as inclusive learning and teaching' (Thomas, 2012, p.36). This suggests that co-curricular content and delivery methods engage and motivate students, and thus are effective ways of improving retention and success. This case study discusses such approaches adopted in an Education Studies module at Newman University.

Rationale

In 2012/13, all 15 credit modular undergraduate programmes at Newman University went through revalidation. This was called the 20 Credit Project whereby revalidated programmes were to be constructed of 10, 20 and 40 credit modules, rather than 15 and 30 credits (see Newman Case study by Lawson *et al*, 2016). The revalidation of Education Studies programmes provided an opportunity to redesign these completely, strengthening the students' relationship with the subject area and their identity as Education Studies students through exposing them to '...a range of practices, theories and ideas that underpin how the work of education is conducted' (Newman University, 2015). Education Studies has always been studied in combination with a second subject, with students taking 50% of their modules in each discipline. However, a key change as part of the revalidation was the removal of a minor education studies route: Such students only began to study education studies in the first semester of level five thus, had not opportunity to develop relationships. Within the new 20 credit structure, only joint honours routes exist and require students to study both subjects equally across each level and semester. This means that connections to peers and staff begin right from the outset of their course.

One of the new mandatory 10 credit level four modules is 'Doing Theory on Education'. This second semester module intended to support students making the transition into and through university, fostering a sense of belonging in students to the Education Studies subject area. Specifically, it engages students in reflecting back on their semester one work to understand their own learning, located within their own experiences but also within literature around student success in HE to generate a sense of identity as a HE learner. The pedagogical approach and assessment design employed within this module to operationalise this included greater emphasis on group discussion and collaboration to promote effective peer-to-peer and staff-to-student relationships.

What follows is a discussion of how this module has promoted peer-to-peer discussion and engagement to initiate the development of the deep learning needed for success and improved retention; and also to promote the effective transfer of knowledge that lead to potentially higher quality learning outcomes (Ramsden, 1992; Biggs, 1999 cited in Gürten, Turan and Senemoğlu, 2013). This is explored through an examination of the increased student interactions on the module discussion forums, and a tentative assertion of improved progression for combined honours students.

The Intervention

In the 10 credit second semester 'Doing Theory on Education' module, students are encouraged to reflect on their studies, experiences and progress across the year. Reflection is used as it helps to make sense of how diverse ideas fit together, and informs how to relate to new ideas against what is already known or when new ideas challenge what is already known (Moon, 2004). The module therefore encourages students to: reflect upon their experience of studying so far alongside opportunities to plan for their future learning needs; identify strategies for successful study and personal development, as well as to be able to make sense of education theory. Students are assessed via a portfolio containing two elements: (1) engagement in the online forum (10% weighting) and (2) production of a 1500-word essay (90% weighting).

Increased online 'e-tivities'

This module also aimed to increase the digital literacy of students and integrates 'e-tivities' (Salmon, 2004) into the module as a mechanism for both formative and summative assessment. These were designed for asynchronous participation but were still required to be completed within a given period via the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) Moodle. E-tivities on this module included extensive use of discussion forums to ensure that the Social, Cognitive and Teaching domains of Garrison et al's 'Community of Enquiry' model were present to provide an effective and meaningful online educational experience (2000 p 87-105). Furthermore, engaging students in group interactions and discussions aimed to mitigate for anxious students worried about their 'online identity' (Baxter and Haycock, 2013, p 30).

In the first iteration of the module in 14/15, students were given the option to engage in e-tivities as described below that encouraged discussion forum use on concepts and theories of Education with formative feedback provided. Subsequently in 15/16 however, this was changed to encourage more interaction to include both optional and assessed elements as follows:

1. The first e-tivity required students to reflect on their role within a group for a poster presentation. They refer to a reading on Belbin's team roles (Jay, 2003) alongside a reading and related discussion on social constructivism. Students were given questions to answer to guide to scaffold their thinking. These were:
 - a. What roles did you take on? Did you feel that the roles you took on were effective for the group? Why?
 - b. How do these connect with the roles identified by Belbin?
 - c. How does social constructivist theory connect with this poster assessment activity?
 - d. Has your learning benefitted from this activity outside of the end product for the assessment?
 - e. Having considered Belbin and social constructivism, how would you approach group work differently in the future?
 - f. What perspectives on group work does Belbin provide that is not included in social constructivism?

For some students this resulted in dialogue with a tutor to clarify or extend their thinking via the forum, thus providing the opportunity for formative feedback.

2. The second e-tivity was viewed as a preparatory (though not formal) directed learning task, engaging students in a specified chapter reading entitled 'Doing Theory' on Education (McDougall and Trotman in Warren, 2009) available on Moodle and asking them to make a post on the discussion forum prompted by a series of questions as follows:
 - a. What is meant by making the familiar, unfamiliar?
 - b. What is theory?
 - c. Why is doing theory important for understanding your Higher Education academic work?
 - d. What is praxis? (p 15)
 - e. How can you relate 'dialectical thinking' (p15) in relation to doing theory, social constructivism and reflection?

- f. How could you use theory to support your arguments within your assessment for this module?
- g. What examples of good practice do you think you should be taking on? (see page 21)
- h. What is meant by theoretical remixing?

Again, this resulted in dialogue with a tutor to clarify or extend their thinking via the forum for some students, an opportunity for formative feedback.

3. The third previously voluntary e-tivity in 14/15 became part of module assessment in 15/16. For 10% of the module marks, students were required to comment on a reading that engaged them in some challenging educational ideas and concepts. Students were requested to:
 - a. Identify an educational idea or concept that can help them improve their HE Study;
 - b. Identify a journal article that relates to this idea or concept;
 - c. In a discussion forum post, highlight the key aspects of the article that can help them take a different approach to their study (in relation to their chosen idea or concept), clearly stating what the initial idea or concept was. Students had to make sure that an accessible link to the article was included so that to others within the group could take a look.

Students were also required to respond to the contributions from other students and tutors. Tutors provided feedback on this to move the learning and understanding on whilst also encouraging the development of dialogue between the participants. This process enabled participating students to monitor, identify and then 'bridge' the gap in the learning process (Hatzipanagos and Warburton, 2003).

As part (1) of the summative assessment was worth 10% of the module mark students specifically needed to participate in the online forum in the following ways:

- Students identify a journal article around an educational idea or concept of interest and write a 250-word critical review in terms of their own learning, posting this to the online forum (worth 4%).
- A module tutor comments on the students post. A further 3 % is awarded if the student responds to the tutor's comments.
- Students gain a further 3% by replying to someone else's post on the forum.

On campus inter-actions

Taught sessions within the module running alongside the e-tivities were designed to provide many opportunities for students to discuss and debate ideas around making sense of education theory, complementing the initial level four semester one mandatory Education studies module. Discussions, as a method of social learning, facilitate student learning and encourage reflection so that students can make comparisons against the way others are learning and to the conclusions they draw from the same data (Biggs and So-kum Tang, 2011, p.68).

To maintain continuity across the academic year and promote learner identity as Education Studies students, they were asked to reflect on two assignments completed in semester one for the mandatory Education Studies module, 'Key Concepts in Education'. They consider two specific points; (1) how they approached the assignment and (2) the mark they achieved. The focus on how they could improve their assignment marks was to encourage a strategic approach to learning that '...when allied to a deep approach to learning in the subject', as Lublin has recognised is likely to '.... deliver both an intelligent engagement with the subject as well as success in the subject' (2003, p.5). Though not part of formal assessment, to aid their reflections the students were also encouraged to make use of the written and audio feedback from the two completed components.

This was envisaged as facilitating ‘...students’ development as independent learners who are able to monitor, evaluate, and regulate their own learning, allowing them to feed-up and beyond graduation into professional practice’ (Ferguson, 2011 cited in Evans, 2013).

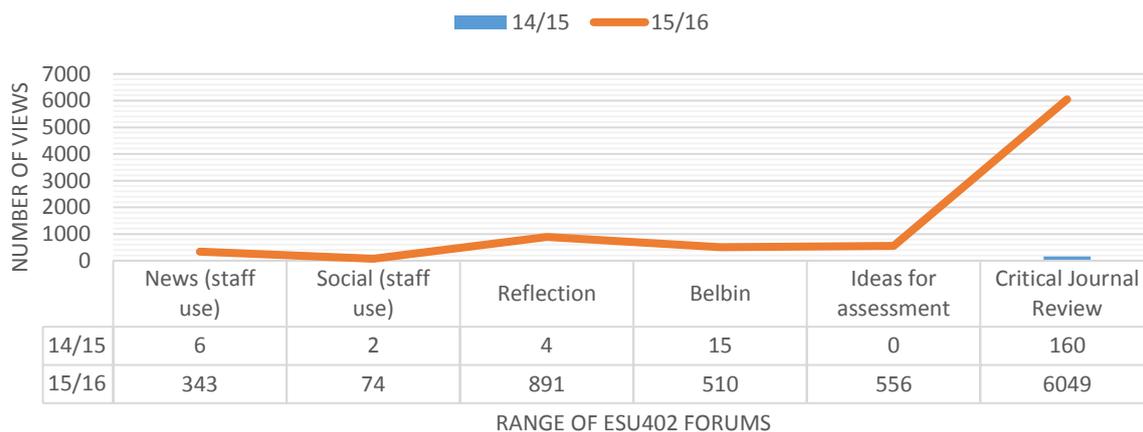
This reflection thus prepared students for the second portfolio assessment element worth 90% of the module marks: the 1500-word essay. The essay encouraged students to relate theories about learning to themselves as learners in Higher Education. The students were asked to locate an educational journal article for themselves, making use of the search skills they had been taught during the module. The intention was for the article to be about an aspect of study that the student had identified they needed to improve as identified in the reflections on previous assessment within the taught sessions hence, students were expected to make links to the theoretical content of the module. For example: a student may have recognised that ideas from social constructivist theory, which were explicitly discussed in the module, were relevant to their own learning and might have discussed how forming a study group could be beneficial to them.

Evidence of impact

Forum inter-action

A very simple and immediate measure of student engagement has been to look at student forum views across the 14/15 and 15/16 iterations of the module.

Figure One: Comparison of ESU402 forum views between 14/15 and 15/16



The figure above shows the increase in forum views between 14/15 when use was optional and 15/16 when forum use became part of the summative assessment and interestingly, when student numbers were lower. This shows the huge growth in staff and student views of forums between the two years. A further look at the use of the forums shows a correlation between a high number of student forum views and higher overall module marks as seen in Figure Two. Interestingly however, students who failed to submit their final assessment did view the forums at the similar level as those gaining an overall third class module grade.

Figure Two: Student forum views correlated to overall module grade

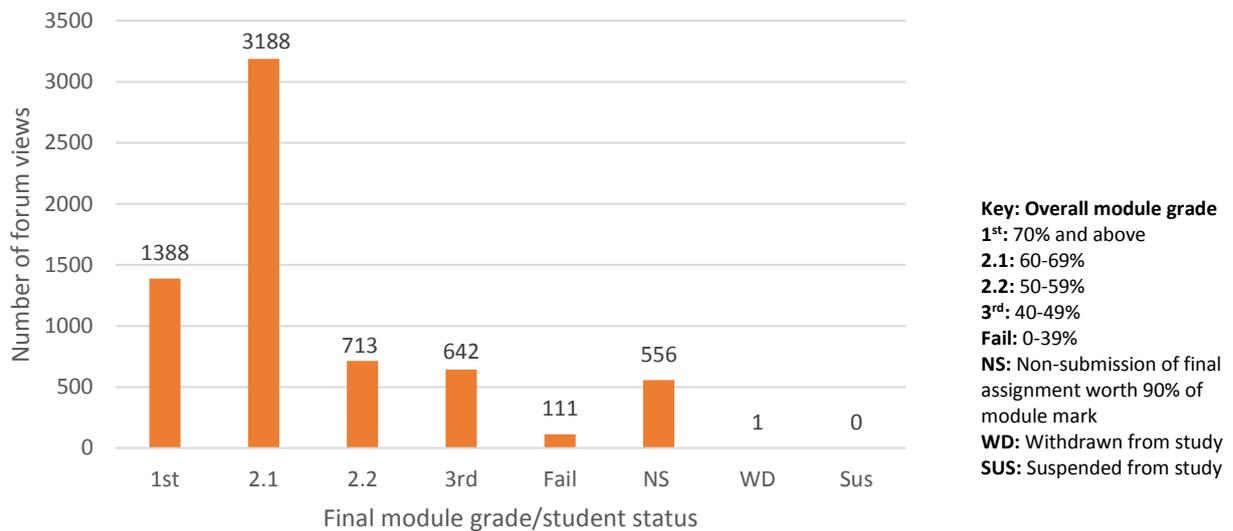
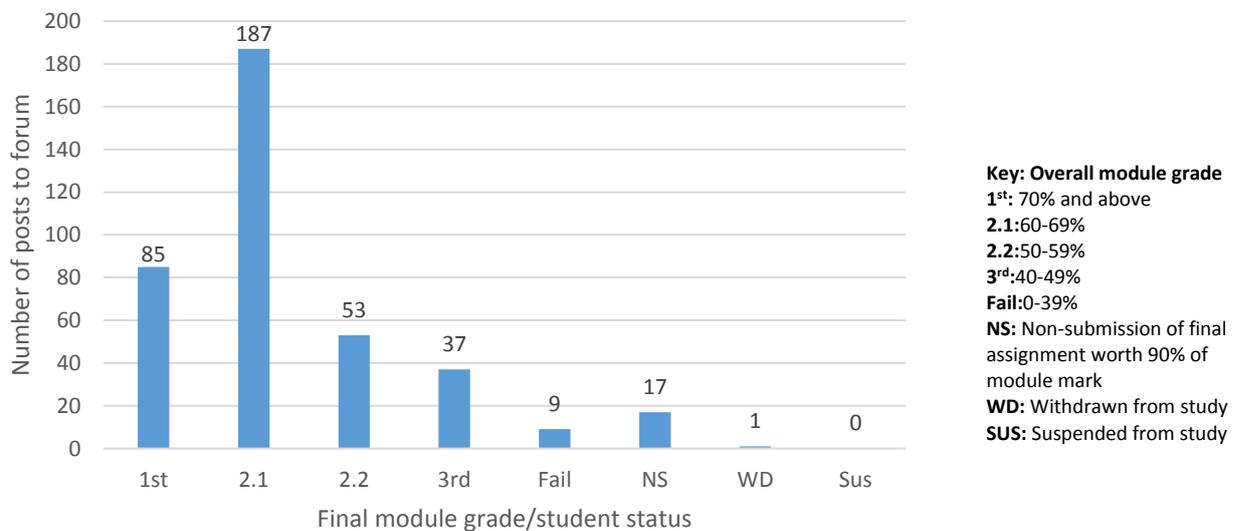


Figure Three shows forum posts compared to final module grade. Here again there is a correlation between students making fewer posts and those gaining lower marks, and might indicate that those students have not considered the forum to be a community or learning environment. This supports a JISC survey of higher education learners that concluded that 'VLEs are often used for passive rather than active learning' (2007, cited in Barker and Grossman, 2013). Indeed, some of the students who achieved third class marks or failed attempts for their assessments have very little evidence of forum posts on Moodle when compared to students achieving a second class or above.

Figure Three: Student forum posts correlated to student overall module grade



Students who achieved higher overall module grades did complete all the e-tivities and is potentially indicative of behaviour in relation to VLEs where engagement can 'maximise student reflection and encourage progressive thought and independent thinking'. (Scardamalia and Bereiter 1996, cited in Barker and Grossman, 2013). Indeed, whilst student have not explicitly discussed how the forum interactions have deepened their learning, they have commented on the value of the forum posts, even when outside of assessment:

Hi [male student],

Just wanted to say what a brilliant, in depth and helpful post. I love all the advice and the honesty you've put across. I can really relate to what you've mentioned and will definitely be looking it up further and using your summary to help with my studies. I feel this will be of great benefit to me and many other students So thanks!!!

(By the way, this is not posted as part of my assessment as I think I've completed that, I genuinely found your post interesting and helpful).

Take care

[female student] :-)

Again I agree with [male student] that at Higher Education like University knowledge is structured in a more socially constructive way, as we are assessed on group work like our poster for ESU401 not just with coursework and exams. Being assessed in this way is helpful as it puts the focus on you to actively get involved in your owning learning.

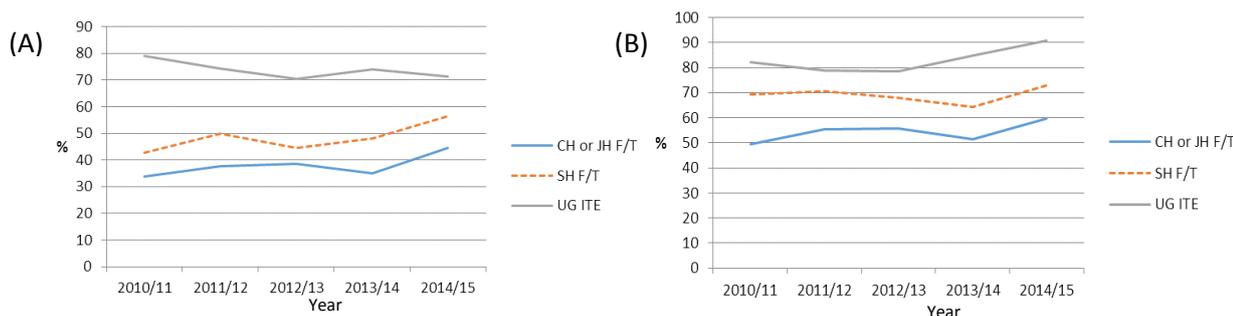
From analysis of forum views, posts and content, there does appear to be a link between higher engagement, higher module grades and thus completion of the module.

Combined honours progression

Internal analysis presented to Senate in March 2016 (Newman, 2016b) whilst positioned at the institutional level is encouraging for programmes where subjects are studied together in combination. This is of particular note for Education Studies as this subject is only studied in combination (50: 50) with others. Figure Four below shows that there has been an increase in students passing at the first attempt (A) and after re-sits (B). All of these students will have studied ESU402.

As detailed in Newman University's final report, 55% (n=378) of students passed the academic year first time in 2014/15, with 17% (n=115) of students passing after re-sits 2014/15.

Figure Four: Percentage comparison of the percentage of level four students on each undergraduate programme passing first time (A) and after resits (B) for the past five years.



Key: CH or JH FT – Full Time Joint Honours programmes | SH F/T – Single Honours Full Time | UG ITE – Undergraduate Initial Teacher Education

Whilst we cannot make an explicit causal link between implementation of the 20-credit structure in 2014/15 and improved progression, there appears to be an emergent correlation between the two. Indeed, the activities delivered in ESU402 (even when forum use was not compulsory in 14/15) appears to have a higher pass rate after re-sits (see Fig. Five) of 84% (n= 93) than the University as a whole (72%; n= 493), and Combined Honours routes overall (61%; n=113).

Figure Five: Completion rates for module ESU402 in 2014/15: Doing Theory on Education

Year of entry	14/15		
	Result		
Number of attempts	Failed	Passed	Total
1	18	88	106
2		4	4
3		1	1
Total	18	93	111

The External examiners report for 2015/16 was positive about the impact of this module on students' progression and success. She commented that the 'Doing Theory on Education' module 'lay the foundations of supporting year one students in the development of their writing and critiquing skills, which was evident in the quality of work when they enter year two'. This recognises that the intervention in this module, to engage students with reflection on their own learning and with forum discussions to deepen their learning, may contribute to the increased quality of work being produced in the second year of study.

In addition, the external examiner recognised that: 'Rewarding students for engaging with online discussion forums was a good idea [in 15/16], as was incorporating what was posted onto the forums in teaching sessions as a starting point for discussions: this both validated and encouraged the students'. The change to make this a summative assessment element of the module is recognised as a positive adjustment to the intervention. It also indicates that to be effective, the online discussions need to be explicitly linked to other learning in the modules to integrate the ideas being generated here into the learning community of the module.

It is of course possible that student success can be attributed to other factors beyond the scope of the study. Future consideration will include an analysis of students' marks from level five, semester one assignments and compare to those awarded in level four (this is the first cohort to have the compulsory 10% element) as well as student interviews.

Sustainability

This case study does need to further gather and analyse longitudinal data. It is expected however that outcomes will reflect the findings of Barker and Gossman (2013) on the impact of VLEs. They note that they '...can; promote reflection, accommodate the needs of students, increase enthusiasm and confidence, improve readiness to learn, and [...] course assessment performance' (p.22). As this module is part of a framework for transitions, it is therefore sustained for the future until perhaps revalidation occurs. What will be needed at this point is to ensure that the principals of this module – in taking what students have already learnt in their first semester to generate reflection on their identity as learners in HE – is maintained in the future iterations. It will not be enough to only provide opportunities for students to use VLEs in their learning. As the findings from Phase 1 of the *What works? Student retention and success change programme* concluded: 'It is not resources but practice, who is teaching and how, and the manner/depth in which students approach their work, that best determines achievements in learning' and thus retention and success (Thomas, 2012, p.32).

This work was undertaken as part of the *What works? Student retention and success change programme*, funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, co-ordinated by the Higher Education Academy and Action on Access.

References

- Barker, J., Gossman, P. (2013) 'The learning impact of a virtual learning environment: students' views' *Teian Journal* 5 (2) July. Available at: <http://194.81.189.19/ojs/index.php/TEAN/article/viewFile/146/261> (Accessed 6.11.2015).
- Baxter, J. and Haycock, J. (2014). *Roles and student identities in online large course forums: implications for practice*. *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, 15(1) pp. 20–40.
- Biggs, J. and So-kum Tang, C. (2011) *Teaching for quality learning at university*, 4th edn, Maidenhead : OUP.
- Brabazon, T. (2007) *The university of Google*, Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Evans, C. (2013) *Making sense of assessment feedback in higher education*. *Review of Educational Research* March 2013 vol. 83 no. 170-120.
- Gürülen, E., Turan, S., and Senemoğlu, N. (2013) *The relationship between learning approaches of prospective teachers and their academic achievement*, *Educational Research and Review* Vol. 8(5), pp. 171-178.
- Hatzipanagos, S. and Warburton, S. (2009) *Feedback as Dialogue: Exploring the Links between Formative Assessment and Social Software in Distance Learning* King's College London, UK.
- Jay, R. (2003) *How to build a great team*, London: Prentice Hall Business
- Lawson, D., Katafiasz, K., Cousins, H. and Healy, L. (2016) *A Curriculum Framework to Support Transitions*, What works? Student retention and success change programme Phase 2, Paul Hamlyn Foundation.
- Lunt, T. and Curran, J. (2010) 'Are you listening please?' *The advantages of electronic audio feedback compared to written feedback*, *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 35:7, 759-769.
- Lublin, J. (2003) *Good Practice in Teaching and Learning*, Centre for Teaching and Learning, University College Dublin.
- Moon, J. (2004) *A handbook of reflective and experiential learning*, London: Routledge: Falmer.
- Nightingale, P. and O'Neil, M. (1994) *Achieving quality learning in higher education*, Abingdon: Routledge.
- Petress, K. (2004) *The Benefits of Group Study*, *Education*, Vol. 124.
- Salmon, G (2002) *E-tivities: The Key to Active Online Learning*, London: Taylor Francis
- Thomas, L. (2012) *Building student engagement and belonging in Higher Education at a time of change*, final report from the What Works? Student Retention and Success programme, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, London.
- Wankel, C. and Blessinger, P. (2012) *Increasing student engagement and retention using online learning activities*, Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing.
- McDougall, J. and Trotman, D. (2009) in Warren, A. (ed.) *An Introduction to Education Studies: Making sense of themes and contexts*, London: Bloomsbury.
- Newman University website (2015) Available at: <http://www.newman.ac.uk/education-studies/749> (Accessed:16 November 2015).

3. Developing interventions to support undergraduate trainee-teachers.

Rationale for the case study

The original What Works? 2012 evidence highlighted high quality student-centred learning and teaching, meaningful interactions, and developing knowledge, confidence and identity as key approaches to improving retention and success (Thomas 2012:6).

Student completion data in July 2013 indicated that 91 /104 (87.5%) undergraduate initial teacher education (ITE) students graduated with their intended Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) award. These students had all begun and completed within their chosen three- or four-year timeframe a degree programme which included the following elements:

The 13 students who did not complete the QTS course all had their expected progress on the course 'interrupted' in order to repeat a school experience module. The majority of these students had to re-sit their second school experience and join a different cohort at some point during the course. Statistically significant features of students within this group included: most were mature; most were male; they had non-traditional level 3 qualifications; they were a mixture of BME and white students. Their exit interviews indicated: a lack of self-confidence in their ability to meet the professional demands of the role; and the expressed opinion that they had not enjoyed returning to new or different groups.

We felt that there was work to be done from the outset of the programme to strengthen individual and cohort identity, and for students to develop confidence as academic learners and developing professionals with the resilience to meet the challenges of a demanding programme, particularly in Year Two.

The interventions included:

- the introduction of first year, first semester professional studies and academic learning module with the aim of embedding professional cohort identity and personal resilience from Induction Week onwards;
- the building in of additional professional and academic support for all ITE students throughout the course, ensuring a focus on specific tasks for those moved outside the expected completion timeline to maintain their sense of identity and their retention and completion.

This staff-led programme was complemented with a student-led 'Faculty Factory', hosted on a closed social media site – in this case Facebook.

The case study will evidence the benefit of these interventions on the retention of the ITE students, and the development of a sense of identity and confidence for those who had to interrupt and rejoin a different cohort.

Description/discussion of the intervention or change initiative and successful aspects

A new approach to student induction and enrolment as a whole was taken in 2013-14, alongside a new 15-credit module: Professional Studies Academic Learning (PSAL) at level 4 in semester one. This module, which replaced one 15-credit subject specialist module was planned so that it would begin in Induction Week in order to develop a whole cohort and programme identity rather than developing smaller subject-specialist identities which had previously been an aim of the ITE programme. The module was designed to prepare students for embarking upon independent, academic study at university, and the different knowledge, skills and attributes required to lead learning in classroom settings as trainee teachers. It aimed to:

- Provide opportunities for students to develop skills in reflective practice and how to relate those skills to their theoretical studies.
- Provide opportunities for students to develop their independent academic study skills in a range of contexts.
- Develop and consolidate students' use of virtual learning environments (VLEs) and on-line reflective journals so that they developed strategies of planning, learning and evaluating own progress.

- Provide opportunities for students to recognise the importance of effective communication, team working skills and relationships with mentors.

Teaching staff on this module included the Head of School Partnership, the Programme Leader for Undergraduate ITE, and academic leads from English, Art, Physical Education, Humanities and Early Years Education, who would each lead subject-specialist modules later in the year.

The PSAL module introduced all students to an on-line e-portfolio, which they would use for the remainder of their course to record their reflections, individual targets and evidence of their academic and professional successes. Additionally, this embedded e-portfolio could be exported and maintained in different formats, a potential benefit to those who might have to 'interrupt' their studies (for example a suspension of registration having failed the school experience module) and have their access to the Newman University intranet temporarily stopped.

Additionally, during Induction Week 2013, the Students' Union facilitated the establishment of 'The Faculty Factory', which was administered and regulated by the students themselves. This had been trialled in 2012-13 and returning second-year students had indicated that the social networking platform had provided supportive on-line and face-to-face peer relations within and between a broad range of students who might not have got to know each other otherwise. It was decided to extend this to all first year ITE trainees in 2013-14, with students who had been active on the site becoming mentors for the new first-year regulators.

Additionally, during the 2013-14 Induction Week, an invitation was sent out to those who had interrupted and were returning to study to attend the events in order to build their confidence and support their re-integration into academic and professional life. This replaced the practice of inviting returners into Newman for an individual interview with the Programme Leader prior to commencement of the academic year.

What happened?

The PSAL module began in Induction Week and the range of activities included:

- introduction to reflection and to reflective activities;
- how to manage an on-line portfolio, including how to use the templates provided;
- an introduction to research-informed practice;
- and a self-directed, off-site task in a local museum to create a knowledge bank which would be used later in the module.
-

Attendance at all university-based sessions was 100% and the 'selfies' uploaded to the e-portfolio indicated that the off-site task was completed by 98% of the students. All Induction Week learning opportunities were revisited in the Core Curriculum (English, Mathematics and Science) module and the knowledge bank created at the museum was used in a peer-reviewed, formative assessment task in the PSAL module. Attendance during semester 1 averaged at 97% across the Core and PSAL modules and regular feedback from academics evidenced that groups were positively engaged in completing directed tasks, thus making academic progress. The PSAL module included directed tasks focused on engaging with the e-portfolio and the university's virtual learning environment (VLE) to support wider academic and professional development.

The PSAL module was assessed through the use of tasks submitted electronically, with students having the opportunity to submit at formative assessment points throughout the module. Students who did not engage with the tasks were highlighted to their Academic Professional Tutors (APT) at each formative assessment point so that closer monitoring, support and induction into academic and professional behaviours could be given.

The 2013-14 Faculty Factory was a success. Unlike the e-portfolio and virtual learning environment, no members of staff were part of the group. Four ITE students, who had run a similar social networking site at a local further education college, assumed responsibility for moderation and took over from the previous year's Students' Union facilitators. The moderators discussed site protocols with the ITE team and these were adhered to throughout the period of the intervention. The moderators in their turn introduced the concept to the 2014-15 cohort during Induction Week 2014 and acted as peer mentors for Faculty Factory III.

Less successful was the 2013-14 invitation to returners to attend Induction Week events. There were two reasons identified for this. Firstly, the invitation was sent to all returners across Newman and had a focus on general academic study and non-academic support services which meant that it did not target individual students within their chosen academic areas. This outcome could have been predicted, using evidence from the first phase of the What Works? programme which highlights the academic sphere as the most important site for nurturing participation. (Thomas 2012:6). The outcome of this was that, during the 2014-15 Induction Week, returners were invited to the HEADstart programme and / or to the academic events from their subject area. Feedback from academic staff in 2014-15 indicated that this was more successful for students returning to the first year.

The second reason was that students not returning to the first year of the ITE programmes during 2013-14 indicated in their first Academic Professional Tutor meetings that they thought the material would not be relevant to their second and third years of study or to their school experience modules. In order to overcome this barrier and to support retention and success, the decision was made to revert, for the remainder of the project, to the previous process of a formal meeting with the Programme Leader during the semester prior to re-enrolment. The meeting included a reflective interview, a review of targets and an updated reading list to engage with, prior to the commencement of any required academic modules.

The Head of School Partnership and the Programme Leader also introduced focused interventions for those students who had completed all their academic work and were returning to complete a school experience only. These students were expected to keep in touch with the Programme Leader by means of a monthly email using their personal email address. With their permission, the School Partnership Office used that email address to invite them in to school experience briefings and pre-school interventions focused on their post school experience action plans. These pre-school interventions were undertaken in school experience module groups which meant that returners could link with other students who would be out in school at the same time as them. This allowed them to form peer-to-peer support networks and to join Faculty Factory I, II or III.

The change in induction processes occurred at the same time as some significant structural changes to the programme. Newman University operates within two semesters and evidence from withdrawal forms prior to 2013 indicated that workload / academic failure was a key issue for those not making a successful return to study and school experience. The organisation of the semesters meant that, in years one and two, students' workloads and assessment opportunities were not balanced and, due to double modules taught across both semesters', the eight modules each year could be heavily weighted in one semester (e.g. 1:7 or 2:6). This is a challenging workload, particularly when at least six weeks of one semester could be based in school. The move to 20-credit modules, which commenced in 2014-15, meant that there were now three assessed modules per semester. A revalidation of the whole programme was carried out during 2013-14 and the PSAL module became embedded from 2014 onwards into two modules entitled: *Ground Rules for Membership of a Scholarly Community*, and *Introduction to Professional Development and Practice within a School Setting*.

Additionally, to improve the students' experience, it was agreed during 2012-13 that the assessed time spent in schools during the first and second years of study should be added onto the semester periods rather than sitting inside it so that students – including returners - did not have to have academic content concentrated into very short, intense periods but could, like all undergraduate students, spend a longer period of time developing level 4 and level 5 academic and professional behaviours. This meant that in 2013-14 the first-year school experience moved from the primary schools' half-term before Christmas to the first half of the schools' Summer term, so that the professional and academic behaviours introduced in the PSAL module could be developed throughout the second semester before school experience began. In the second year it meant that academic reflection could take place after the second school experience

Evidence of impact

We were particularly interested in the impact these interventions had for students in year two, where many of the challenges of a teacher-training course become apparent.

Induction Week, with its academic and professional focus both on- and-off site, meant that trainees bonded very quickly into friendship groups which complemented the subject specialist and core teaching groups they would establish later. For many of the Newman students who lived at home, the opportunities to develop travel arrangements and study-buddy groupings added to the cohort's sense of belonging. It can be correlated to the cohort responding to the statement, '**I feel like I belong to the University**' with a mean score of 3.77 on a scale of 1-5 (with 5 being 'strongly agree') on the HEA 'What Works' survey, and grading 'belongingness' as 3.76 in year two.

The structure of the PSAL module meant that 95% of students passed the module first time (Cohort average of 75%). This module and the behaviours of academic and professional engagement introduced, developed and consolidated within other modules can be seen as contributing to students grading their '**confidence in completing the programme successfully**' at 3.83 and '**expecting to do well**' at 4.00 in year two.

The 2013-14 cohort used Faculty Factory II to keep in touch, to support, to challenge and to celebrate. Any major queries about the course were channelled through Staff Student Consultative Committees or, for more minor queries, a representative from the Factory met with or emailed the Programme Leader and this led to a mean grading of 4.3. in response to the statement, '**I expect to discuss work with members of staff**'. Groups of students with, for example, caring commitments were able to use the network to remain in contact with groups for shared learning. Social events were organised and resources and ideas were shared. On one occasion, the Faculty Factory instigated a change to the overall programme, which led to the re-institution of an Art specialism and contributed to the cohort's grading of their '**engagement with the programme overall as 3.92**' in year two.

Moving the first school experience to later in the academic year meant that the professional expectations increased as students would have more knowledge and understanding of the role of a teacher. In its turn, this ensured that the expectations for the second-year school experience were not such a challenge, thereby leading to increased numbers of students being successful at their first attempts. However, if they were unsuccessful in either year one or year two, engagement with the resits, beginning with the use of students' personal email to maintain contact and the focused interventions linking them to other students at similar points of the course, supported them to redevelop confidence and to undertake resit school experiences.

Academic year	Incomplete second year school experience resits %
2012-13	13.8%
2013-14	12.1%
2014-15	11.9%

Student success measured by retention:

The 2013-14 cohort had a 93.5% retention rate in year one (July 2014) and a 94.8%% retention rate in year two (July 2015). The focus on the cohort identity in Induction Week was maintained and the 2014-15 cohort had a retention rate of 94.8% at the end of year one.

85% of the 2013-14 students successfully completed all their second year modules (2014-15) and could progress into the third year.

Eight students from the 2013-14 cohort had withdrawn by the end of year two. This is a reduction of five non-completers from the baseline data. Ethnicity and age were not numerically significant in this group, indicating that the interventions may have played a part in retaining these trainees. However, five non-completers entered university with Access or mixed qualifications at level three and three of those who withdrew were male (17% of the original cohort) so these remain aspects to consider in future.

Sustainability

The academic balance of the year, the post-school targeted interventions and the portable e-portfolio with its dual focus on professional and academic behaviours and the Faculty Factory have all been maintained, and, as the 2013 -14 cohort complete in Summer 2016 and Summer 2017, the overall success of the intervention in supporting the cohort to exit with their original award will be seen.

Lessons learnt

Don't give up even when the structures appear to be against you! Some of the changes (e.g. re-balancing the workload and assessment opportunities for students who have to undertake school experiences) took several years to suggest as an improvement, prove and then implement.

If a key element from 'What Works?' Phase 1 was that the HE experience should be relevant to the students' interests and goals, the earlier this is embedded the better. The year one induction aimed to do this by linking immediately to school through developing a knowledge bank for use in a classroom and by embedding the academic practices that allow students to enter a research -informed profession.

By developing a bespoke re-induction programme for returners, via a personal interview, a focused action plan and a meeting with a group of peers in similar circumstances in a structured, focused setting, success, though not guaranteed, is more likely.

Reference list

Thomas L (2012) *Building student engagement and belonging in Higher Education at a time of change: a summary of findings and recommendations from the What Works? Student Retention and Success programme* The Higher Education Academy