



***FE/HE TRANSITION PROJECT
2002-2004***

**Final project report for
The North Forum
for Widening Participation in Higher Education**

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July 2005**



FOREWORD

The North Forum for Widening Participation in Higher Education (the North Forum) is one of four Regional Forums for Wider Access in Scotland, which were set up and are funded by the Scottish Funding Councils for Further and Higher Education. The North Forum was set up in late 1999.

The North Forum is a partnership of all of the Further Education Colleges (FECs) and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the North of Scotland (i.e. Grampian, Moray, and the Highlands and Islands) and other organisations that are involved in lifelong learning, including local authorities. A full membership list is set out at the back of this report.

The mission statement of the North Forum is “to work in partnership to increase the number of people from under-represented groups in the North of Scotland who progress on to higher education and to work together to reduce barriers to progression between education sectors.”

The North Forum has developed a strategy to increase the number of people in the North of Scotland from under-represented groups who participate in higher education (i.e. advanced courses and above) and its overarching aim is to implement this strategy through a work programme. This work programme is made up of projects that are either commissioned by the North Forum or are the result of bids from partner institutions or organisations.

The FE/HE Transition project is the result of a joint bid from the FECs and HEIs in the North East of Scotland (Aberdeen College, Banff and Buchan College, The Robert Gordon University and the University of Aberdeen). Its aim was to reduce or eliminate barriers to smooth transition between the institutions so that students are able to move from an FEC to an HEI with ease and confidence. The project has achieved that aim by working with staff and students to identify the barriers and then initiating activity within the institutions to reduce or eliminate those barriers. This report and its appendices describe in detail the work that was undertaken.

The project no longer receives funding from the North Forum. At the end of the period of funding, the institutions involved agreed that the work done was so successful that it should be provided as part of their core activity. The project has resulted in long-lasting benefits for students and it has taken real steps to address the difficulties of moving from one institution to another.

Although the project involved partners in the North East of Scotland only, the work undertaken and the lessons learnt will be of use to all institutions dealing with transition. In addition, the project has developed two tools that can be used by all institutions; the study skills CD ROM and the buddy scheme manual.

Prof. John Harper, Chair
July 2005

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1. INTRODUCTION

This collaborative project, funded through the North Forum for Widening Participation in Higher Education (North Forum), has been operational from January 2002 through to December 2004. This report follows on from the annual reports that were presented to the North Forum in 2002 and 2003 and concentrates on the project's activities and outputs during its final year, which concluded with a successful conference in December 2004.

This report is supported by the following appendices, which give more detailed information about the work that the project has achieved:

Appendix 1	Project report 2002
Appendix 2	Project report 2003
Appendix 3	Tracking students
Appendix 4	FE Information Days – March '04
Appendix 5	Subject/ Staff liaison meetings
Appendix 6	Study Skills/HE Orientation Events
Appendix 7	Buddy Scheme
Appendix 8	Study Skills CD ROM (report available on North Forum website)
Appendix 9	“Supporting the Bridge” conference report

The complete report is available to read on or to download from the North Forum website www.scotland-northforum.ac.uk/reports.

2. BACKGROUND

The project was set up in January 2002 following a bid to the North Forum. The Forum agreed to fund the project for one year, this period was then extended to December 2004. The aim of the project was to ensure that the process of transition between an FEC and an HEI in the North East of Scotland was as smooth for each student as possible. This would be achieved by working with staff and students to identify the barriers to successful transition, identify practical solutions to address those problems and to work jointly to take positive action to eradicate or reduce the barriers. The project was a partnership between Aberdeen College, Banff and Buchan College, The Robert Gordon University (RGU) and the University of Aberdeen (UofA).

The project was managed by a Steering Group, which consisted of representatives from each institution. The lead institution for the project was the UofA. The UofA chaired the Steering Group, employed and managed the project officer and provided accommodation for the project officer.

3. WORK UNDERTAKEN BY THE PROJECT

3.1 Tracking Students

This exercise was conducted in February/March 2004 and continued the work of the first tracking report of 2003. Within this exercise the original cohort of students were contacted again, together with four additional cohort groups. The main objective was to identify how effective the FE/HE support events that had been supported by the project had been in smoothing the transition process of students from the partner colleges.

The groups were as follows:

- a. students registered at University of Aberdeen (UofA) who had attended both the Information Day and HE Familiarisation Course,
- b. students registered at RGU who had attended FE/HE support events,
- c. students who had booked but did not attend,
- d. registered students who had no contact with the project.

The exercise indicated conclusively the benefit of the FE/HE support events and highlighted the barriers to accurately tracking students as being:

- Data Protection
- different Management Information Systems
- students not completing all fields in application forms
- changing contact details

The study indicated clearly the need for an accurate “tracking mechanism” to follow students through the education process. Currently data has to be trawled manually, which is extremely time-consuming and the conclusions cannot be guaranteed to be accurate.

Through the three years of the project the numbers of transition students between the project partners were:

At RGU a rise of 79 (26%) entering F/T undergraduate degree courses. The percentage of students from the partner colleges of the total intake from all FECs remained fairly constant at 80% to 79%.

At UofA a fall of 10 (9%) entering F/T undergraduate degree courses. The percentage of students from the partner colleges of the total intake from all FECs, showed an increase from 46% to 52%.

In conclusion the report findings indicated the:

- importance of good articulation agreements
- need for standard induction programmes for all levels of entry
- importance of additional support e.g. study workshops and buddy schemes

See Appendix 3 for more detailed information about this part of the project.

3.2 FE information days

These events were run between the partner Colleges and Universities every year of the project.

Numbers attending

Year	University of Aberdeen	The Robert Gordon University
2002	Expected – 34 Attended – 18 (53%)	Expected – 49 Attended – 23 (47%)
2003	Expected – 110 Attended – 53 (48%)	Expected – 170 Attended – 94 (55%)
2004	Expected – 45 Attended – 25 (55%)	Expected – 144 Attended – 93 (65%)

The Information Days’ programmes were devised specifically for FE students to visit the Universities and Departments of interest, to assess what a move from FE to HE entailed and whether it was right for them. The timing of these days was challenging and over the three years of the project March was regarded as best as the best time. Promoting the Days to FE students and encouraging them to attend proved problematic. Over the life of the project this was done by:

- requesting contact details from College Tutors of students they considered potential “Transition Students”. This was only done in Year 1 of the project (2002) due to Data Protection,
- giving talks and presentations about HE. This was done every year, but attendance at these talks was usually poor, despite College promotion,
- posters/leaflets/FE/HE information flyers put into every HN student’s induction pack,

- sending an invitation and application form to every HN student. This was done in Year 3 of the project (2004).

Over the three years of the project a high percentage of applicants failed to arrive on the day. In conclusion, these Information Days are likely to continue as part of an FE/HE programme of events, possibly running over one day only, possibly subject/course specific.

See Appendix 4 for more detailed information about this part of the project.

3.3 Subject/staff liaison meetings

These meetings were identified as a priority area of activity for the project, and meetings between FE and HE staff within different subject areas were co-ordinated through 2002 and 2003. Due to the specific articulation agreements between the project partners, in Year 3 of the project (2004) these meetings continued between the involved partners. The project instigated and encouraged sectoral dialogue, which is continuing.

See Appendix 5 for more detailed information about this part of the project.

3.4 HE familiarisation events

These events started in year 2 of the project (2003) when FE students who had applied from the partner Colleges were invited to attend their chosen University for a course devised to prepare them for HE study.

At RGU over 2003/2004 period the course evolved from a two-day event between all the RGU Campuses, to a Campus specific one-day introductory course with a series of follow-up/support workshops. The programme had been tailored for the large number of FE students entering the University and a total of 108 attended over the two days (65% of acceptances and 45% of invitations sent out). Following this event these attendees were also offered a programme of support workshops.

At UofA in the period 2003/2004 the course ran over three days and due to a lower number of attendees the programme included support workshops, a library activity and a family visit. A total of 36 students attended the three-day course (90% of acceptances and 29% of invitations sent out).

Students attending these events valued them highly, citing in particular their increased confidence about HE study. These events evolved through the life of the project, enabling them to be embedded into the institutions and to be delivered in the future by the Centre for Student Access (CenSA) at RGU and the Centre for Lifelong Learning (CLL) at UofA.

See Appendix 6 for more detailed information about this part of the project.

3.5 Buddy scheme

Through 2003 and 2004, the project supported buddy schemes, which were piloted and introduced in RGU and UofA respectively, to provide an additional source of informal support to FE Transition students, particularly those with advanced entry. Both schemes were set up to be largely "student led" with staff support. Both schemes have been very successful and will continue as a valued support mechanism within both institutions, possibly rolling out to encompass other groups or students entering HE through non-traditional routes e.g. summer school; access programmes.

A direct output from this scheme was the “Buddy Training Manual”, a practical guide to setting up a Buddy Scheme within an institution. This manual was produced through collaboration between the project partners. A limited print run was produced to launch at the Conference and an electronic version is available to download from the North Forum website www.scotland-northforum.ac.uk/reports.

See Appendix 7 for more detailed information about this part of the project.

3.6 Study skills CD ROM

A major output of the project was the production of the “Skills for Success in Higher Education” CD ROM, a valuable support resource for a wide potential market. The CD ROM aims to support the process of transition by highlighting the differences in learning styles between the FE and HE sector and by offering practical solutions to address these differences.

The CD ROM was launched at the Conference and has been distributed widely. Further copies are available from the North Forum.

See Appendix 8 for more detailed information about this part of the project.

3.7 “Supporting the Bridge” conference

This was the third and final conference hosted by the FE/HE Transition Project. The first, “Making the Link”, took place in January 2002 to launch the project and its aims and objectives. The second conference, “Forging the Links”, took place in December 2002 and aimed to disseminate information about current practices and activities within FE/HE transition that were taking place across Scotland.

The third and final conference, “Supporting the Bridge”, took place in December 2004. It aimed to demonstrate the progress made towards smoother transition between FECs and HEIs, to encourage dialogue about how the work will be continued and to launch the two main outputs of the project, the “Buddy Training Manual” and the “Skills for Success in HE” CD ROM.

See Appendix 9 for more detailed information about this part of the project.

4. PROMOTION OF THE PROJECT

Through 2004 the project was promoted by:

- attendance by the Project Officer at relevant college career events,
- talks and presentations to HN students,
- information leaflets and supporting posters,
- a project “information flyer” put into every HN student’s induction pack,
- distribution of promotional gifts: - pens; highlighters; post-it pads; keyring
- end of project conference

The profile of the project has risen significantly over the three years and its activities have been embedded into the HN students’ calendar of events. Continuity is the key and the project has been mindful of establishing activities and events that can be continued and “rolled-out” by the project partners.

5. BUDGET

Through the three years of the project the budget was difficult to manage due to it being held and administered by one University and all invoices/claims being paid by the other University partner. This process could take up to 3 months, making it difficult to access the current financial position of the project. Through the first two years this process had resulted in an underspend and the possibility of a funding reduction. In the 2003 Project Report a proposal was made for allocation of the budget through the final year, i.e. Buddy Training Manual, CD ROM. All of the major proposals were completed and launched during 2004 and all within the budgeted figures. Unfortunately the Project's final spend went over budget, as it omitted to incorporate the increase in the salary of the Development Officer compared to the original budget figure, and the cost of advertising the p/t secretarial post.

A simpler, more transparent budget process would assist future projects to manage their budget more efficiently.

6. ACHIEVEMENTS

During the three years of the Project, the original aims and objectives have been fulfilled. The principal achievements were:

- The increase in co-operation and the strengthened links between the four project partners.
- The identification of barriers to smooth transition
- The development of a joint work programme to address those barriers, which included:
 - establishing a "calendar of events" for FE/HE Transition, which could be adapted to meet the strategic developments of the institutions,
 - supporting the development of buddy schemes in the 2 HEIs,
 - producing a manual to advise other institutions about setting up a buddy scheme,
 - producing a study skills CD ROM to support students making the transition between and FEC and an HEI,
 - working towards the development of a system of tracking students in order to evaluate the overall success of the project,
 - working with other related national project, such as the SACCA mapping, tracking and bridging project

12. NEXT STEPS

The work that was undertaken by and supported by the project will be continued as part of the mainstream activity of CenSA. The UofA has set up an "FE/HE Transition Unit" to continue and to develop the work of the project. The Project Officer has been employed full-time to set up and run this new Unit.

FE/HE TRANSITION PROJECT
STUDENT TRACKING REPORT

1. BACKGROUND

This report follows on from the initial report, which was produced following contact with students who had attended the HE Information Days in May 2002.

This initial report focussed on students from the partner FECs who registered at either of the partners HEIs.

2. INTAKE 2002**2.1 Data and analysis - students entering full-time undergraduate degree courses**

HEI	U/G intake all FECs	Total intake Abdn Coll.	Advanced Entry	Total intake B&B Coll.	Advanced Entry
University of Aberdeen	246	107 (43.5%)	16 (15%)	6 (2.5%)	2 (33.3%)
The Robert Gordon Univ.	Information not available	278	100 (36%)	21	16 (76%)

The project was able to track the students entering University of Aberdeen from the partner FECs through the academic year 2002/2003.

Of the 107 students from Aberdeen College:

6 (5.5%) failed entrance requirements or did not register
80 (75%) progressed on
21 (19.5%) withdrew or failed year 1

Of the 6 students from Banff & Buchan College:

1 (16.6%) failed entrance requirements
4 (66.6%) progressed on
1 (16.6%) withdrew or failed Year 1

2.2 Student interviews

Approximately one year on from the first report, contact was attempted with six of the original cohort group of the 2002 intake (3 from UoA and 3 from RGU). Four were successfully contacted and agreed to be interviewed, with two (from RGU) no longer at previous contact numbers.

No.1

This student had advanced entry into level 2 at RGU and was now level 3 and planning Honours Year. He admitted to taking time to settle, finding big differences between the demands of HE compared to FE i.e. research, study, essays. Had given up P/T job through pressure of assignments, but now felt more confident and "in control", and was planning to resume P/T work, and so help finances! Felt the decision to continue through to HE had been right and was optimistic that final reward/job would justify the commitments made.

No.s.2 and 3

Both were students who had completed an HNC and entered level 1 in the B.Ed course at UofA. Both had settled well and were coping with demands of their course. Both found the course challenging, especially open learning tasks and placements. One with family commitments was managing to balance family, travel and F/T study, with support i.e. placements nearer home.

Note: Currently there is no advanced entry into the B.Ed course, therefore all students are on an equal basis which tends to be of benefit to students progressing from FECs with an HN qualification and who might be more mature.

No.4

Was the oldest of the four contacted, and when first contacted had gained advanced entry into level 2 Sociology (RGU). On commencing F/T study some disability benefits had been lost, and concern was voiced regarding finances. This student had withdrawn during the 2nd semester citing finance and health problems. When contacted the person was considering re-commencing studies on a part-time basis, so as not to affect benefits.

Note: Alternatives to full-time study would possibly encourage more mature students to continue into HEIs.

3. INTAKE 2003

3.1 Data and analysis - students entering full-time undergraduate degree courses

HEI	U/G intake all FECs	Total intake Abdn Coll.	Advanced entry	Total intake B&B Coll.	Advanced entry
University of Aberdeen	235	112 (47.5%)	16 (14%)	4 (1.7%)	2 (50%)
The Robert Gordon Univ.	422	317 (75%)	165 (52%)	22 (5%)	15 (68%)

3.2 Tracking students from the 2003 intake

The cohort groups were chosen to identify whether the support activities and events (FE Information Days and HE Familiarisation Courses) introduced and supported by the project had benefited the FEC students through the transition to an HEI.

Group 1 Students registered at UofA who had attended both the Information Day and the HE Familiarisation Course (six students).

Group 2 Students registered at RGU, who had attended an Information Day (four students).

Group 3 Students registered at UofA who had booked, but did not attend either the Information Day or the Familiarisation Course (three students).

Group 4 Students registered at UofA who had no contact with the project (two students).

Due to data protection, staff at RGU were unable to confirm whether students who had attended the FE Transition events were now registered students at RGU. The four who comprise Group 2 had completed consent forms, and were contacted randomly.

All the groups were contacted by phone, mostly in the evening, and the same questionnaire was completed for each.

3.2.1 Group 1

Known through attendance at the events, these were the easiest to contact as they had supplied all the relevant contact information and had given permission.

About the students

Ages ranged from 20 to over 45 years, all lived in the Aberdeen area and had attended Aberdeen College. Three were married, with two having dependent children. The cohort comprised four females and two males. One student, originally from Angola, had become ill at Christmas, returned home, and withdrew from his course. (He re-registered on the same course in 2004).

Course related issues

Five of the six stated their course was their first choice. The remaining one was a late applicant through "clearing". Four with HNCs had been given advanced entry to level 2. One with an HNC was a level 1 entry in BEd. The late applicant had an HND and was MA level 1, having rejected a level 3 place at Queen Margaret College and a level 2 place at RGU, because he thought the UofA course sounded "more interesting". Accepting the place at level 1 meant that he was liable to pay a year's fees. When contacted he had withdrawn from the course, and planned to apply for level 2 entry at RGU in 2004.

N.B. This student is confirmed in level 2 at RGU.

The remaining students had settled well into their course.

Student comments/observations (about move to HEI)

- Not enough information was given regarding what was expected in exam essay questions. Two essays in an hour and a half exam "was hard".
- The college system of continuous assessment ensured "you kept up". At university "it's easy to let time slip and then suddenly it's EXAMS!"
- No advice was given about "exam etiquette" i.e. that different subjects sit exams together "I sat in the wrong place, with the wrong exam paper."
- One student felt she "missed out" by not doing a first year as her HNC did not totally prepare her e.g. she missed Level 1 Computer Studies.
- Time management is your own responsibility!
- Some lecturers "look down" on an HNC as a relevant entry to level 2!

Overview

All felt the transition events they attended had prepared them and built their confidence for university studies. The four that remained (when contacted for this study) were enjoying the university experience, finding their course work "challenging", but were confident in their own ability. All stated that being more mature and coming via an FEC, gave University a different perspective.

3.2.2 Group 2

Four students at RGU, who had been contacted randomly.

About the students

Ages ranged from 22 to over 45, with one being single, one married, one divorced, one widowed, one had a dependent child and one had an ailing parent. Two were male and two female, two had previously attended Aberdeen College and two had attended Banff & Buchan College. Two lived in Fraserburgh area, one in Ellon and one in Bridge of Don, so all spent time commuting to RGU. One from Fraserburgh commented "I have to leave home at 7 a.m. to get parked at Garthdee". All stated that commuting lengthened their day considerably, but they preferred to arrive early to park and have time in the library.

Course related issues

Three of the four were on their first choice course. One had changed course soon after registration, was now happy and praised the advice and support he had received.

Three had advanced entry, one to level 2 and one to level 3. The fourth student had applied to level 2 Art & Design, but had been persuaded that level 1 was better for him and after one semester he was in full agreement. The two level 3 students praised the support received from staff/tutors, both received good induction and both had progressed with other FE students, forming their social group and both felt comfortable at university. Both found their course demanding and one stated she put herself under pressure by reading too much and submitting too great a volume of work!

The level 1 Art & Design student had found the first semester demanding, feeling constantly assessed and under scrutiny, but reasoned everyone was the same, as options and choices had to be decided. The student who had changed course/school and level of study was also liable to pay 7/8 fees, but felt happy with choice, and appreciative of staff support.

Student comments/observations (about move to the HEI)

- “I certainly feel the age gap as far as technology is concerned.”
- “I sometimes feel I am always justifying my right to be here, but my confidence is growing.”
- “I am glad I am older, and know why I am here.”
- “I knew I was responsible for managing my time and study, but it has been hard.”
- “The move from College to University has gone well, thanks to good staff support.”

Overview

The four students had attended an Information Day and the two level 3 entries had attended the Familiarisation Event, and were very positive about the benefits they gained. The two who had not attended stated that they had received information, chose not to attend, but now regretted their decision having spoken to attendees, as they felt it could have better prepared them.

3.2.3 Group 3

Three students who booked but did not attend “Transition Events” at UofA.

About the students

Ages ranged from 19 to 40, one lived in Aberdeen and two in the suburbs, one male and two female, one married, one separated, one single, and two with dependent children. All had attended Aberdeen College. All lived at home and their travelling time to University was short.

Course related issues

All had an HNC and had advanced entry to level 2 of their first choice course. The single male had already withdrawn and was doing an apprenticeship in Electrical Engineering. “My HNC Electrical Engineering prepared me for the Engineering subjects, but I struggled with the other subjects.” He admitted that he had not stayed very long (1 month) and had discussed his decision with his adviser.

The other two found level 2 work demanding, but felt their HNC course had prepared them. Both found volume of work and the fact they covered four subjects in a week difficult to manage, but were adjusting. Both said they did not receive a proper induction. They had been offered the chance to do level 1 Computing, but could not fit it into their timetable. Both felt disadvantaged by missing level 1.

Student comments/observations (about move to HEI)

- Departments take for granted that we know what was covered in Level 1.
- Missed Level 1 guides, i.e. how to do Reports – had to ask.
- No advice was given to prepare for Exams.
- College prepared me for the work, but I felt very out of place to start with.

Overview

The two remaining students had taken time to settle, but had successfully completed level 2. They admitted that the Transition Course would have helped them settle quicker into HE. Both were now enjoying University life.

3.2.4 Group 4

Registered students (University of Aberdeen) who had no contact with the Project.

About the students

Both were male, aged early twenties and early thirties and single. Both had achieved an HND, one at Banff & Buchan College and one at Aberdeen College. The older student had then worked for many years before commencing at an HEI and he gained level 3 entry (through lengthy negotiation) and the other student was level 2 entry. One lived near Fraserburgh and spent 3 hours daily commuting. The other student lived in Aberdeen.

Course related issues

Both were in their first choice courses, both had met their Advisers at matriculation. The level 2 entrant had received good support from B.Eng., had settled well and was achieving good results. The level 3 entrant had many problems, including wrong course, level and timetable. He stated it took three months to “find feet” but had good support from library staff and ALSU (Academic Learning and Study Unit). He maintained that his maturity prevented him from quitting, and it was into the second semester, and contact with other mature students, before he felt more settled.

Student comments/observations (about move to HEI)

- “College work is more quantity rather than quality”.
- You are too “spoonfed” at College.
- You could prepare better at University if course notes were available before lectures.
- At University you are just a number, but it makes you more self-reliant.

Overview

Both students claimed they knew nothing about the Transition Courses, but both said they would have been working, so would not have been able to attend. Both agreed that the programme would have benefited them and suggested that a series of “support workshops” be available at the start of first semester (these support workshops are available through CenSA at RGU and are being introduced by ALSU at UofA).

Points to note from the tracking exercise)

- The “Transition Support Programme” was very successful for the students who attended, and achieved its objective of easing FE/HE Transition.
- Contact with potential transition students, regarding the HE Familiarisation Course, should be through Admissions, to ensure that ALL eligible students are contacted.
- Induction for advanced entry students should be standard and compulsory, and should not be dependent on individual Departments.

4. INTAKE 2004

4.1 Data and analysis - students entering full-time undergraduate degree courses

HEI	U/G intake All FECs	Total intake Abdn Coll.	Advanced entry	Total intake B&B Coll.	Advanced Entry
University of Aberdeen	197	100 (51%)	20 (20%)	3 (1.3%)	2 (66.6% ⁰)
The Robert Gordon Univ.	478	348 (73%)	179 (51.5%)	30 (6%)	14 (47%)

Over the three years of the FE/HE Transition project the number of students:

- from Aberdeen College to RGU increased by 70 (25%)
- from Banff & Buchan College to RGU increased by 9 (43%)
- from Aberdeen College to UofA decreased by 7 (6.5%)
- from Banff & Buchan College to UofA decreased by 3 (50%)

Over the three years of the Project, the number of full-time, undergraduate students entering the partner Universities from the partner FE Colleges, compared to the total number of full-time undergraduate students entering the partner Universities from ALL FE Colleges was: -

University of Aberdeen

	<u>2002</u>	<u>2003</u>	<u>2004</u>
Number of students from all FE Colleges	246	235	197
Number of students from partner Colleges	113 (46%)	116 (49%)	103 (52%)

Over the three years of the project, the percentage of entrants from all FE Colleges, made up from the project partner Colleges, has increased by 6%.

The Robert Gordon University

	<u>2002</u>	<u>2003</u>	<u>2004</u>
Number of students from all FE Colleges	n/a	422	478
Number of students from partner Colleges	299	339 (80%)	378 (79%)

Over the last two years of the project, the percentage of entrants from all FE Colleges made up from the project partner Colleges has decreased by 1%.

At RGU, compared to UofA, a much higher percentage of the total FE students intake into full-time undergraduate degree courses came from the two partner FE Colleges.

5. BARRIERS TO ACCURATE TRACKING OF STUDENTS

Attempting to track students through the project has been very time consuming and frustrating, due to the following: -

- Data protection – even when students have given permission to be contacted, the colleges and universities were unable to confirm that they:
 - had successfully completed HN qualification
 - had achieved the required entry requirements
 - were registered students/had advanced entry
- The project partners having different Management Information Systems
- Students not accurately completing all fields in application forms so that College was often not cited as the last educational institution and not quoting HNC or HND as highest entry qualification
- Students changing contact details but not updating records, such as change of address and telephone number.

6. UPDATE ON RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE FIRST REPORT

6.1 The development and review of Articulation Agreements

This work is on-going, with RGU further developing 2 + 2 agreements, and UoA reviewing current agreements and negotiating new models.

This study has shown that a number of students with advanced entry do not find transition to be smooth, and articulation agreements should provide:

- a match of units/subjects between two years of HN and level one and level two Degree study
- provision for any “shortfalls” to be added on e.g. Maths and IT
- for senior FEC and HEI staff being involved throughout the process. Staff should be committed to “seamless articulation”

6.2 The review of admissions procedures

This work continues and ties in closely with articulation developments. This study showed admission procedures still vary a great deal and should aim to become, where feasible, standard, transparent and workable. The SCQF should provide the model to build upon.

6.3 Broadening of partnerships and agreements with FECs

A lot of progress has been made, and is on-going. Ultimately it is hoped that a clear, workable route for every subject area is identified, taking students through FEC to HEI. Demographically, this cohort of students can be regarded as a “growth area”!

6.4 Inter-institutional staff liaison

Within the life of the project, meetings took place for the different subject areas and progress was made towards updating previous agreements and introducing new articulation agreements. It was decided that, due to the different partnership agreements, RGU and UofA should progress these meetings independently and these meetings are ongoing.

6.5 FE/HE transition “Support Event”

The following activities and events have become established during the life of the project

- FEC students Information Days
- HEI familiarisation courses

Separate reports have been submitted for these events (see Appendices 4 and 6).

Also talks and presentations about study at HEIs have been given to students in both colleges.

It has been during these support activities that initial contact was made with students, which enabled the tracking exercise.

6.6 Buddying and mentoring schemes

Buddy Schemes, providing additional support for FE/HE Transition students, have been successfully established at both Universities (see Appendix 7 for further information).

7. TRACKING – INTO THE FUTURE?

To enable successful/reliable future tracking, a “tracking tool/mechanism” is required, which accurately identifies students from school > FEC > HEI. Suggested tools to explore further would be the use of the Scottish Candidate Number and/or the National Insurance number.

Also, to comply with Data Protection, each student must consent to being contacted or “tracked”

Tracking work that is continuing at UofA as a result of this study will aim to identify the percentage of applicants from FE Colleges that are converted to registered students.

8. CONCLUSION

The main objective of this exercise was to identify whether the FE/HE Transition Project’s Support Events had been effective in easing the move between college and university, thus enabling students to settle more quickly into University life. This objective has been largely achieved, and, as normally occurs, the process has identified future areas of work.

Morag Reid
Project Development Officer
March 2004

FE/HE TRANSITION PROJECT

A REPORT ON THE “INFORMATION DAYS FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS” MARCH 2004 (A University familiarisation event for FEC students)

1. RATIONALE

The “Information Days” were held at both The Robert Gordon University and University of Aberdeen during March 2004, as part of the continuing range of strategies developed within the FE/HE Transition Project to aid successful progression of FEC students to university degree programmes.

2. PLANNING

Planning of these events commenced in late 2003, when the dates were finalised as:

The Robert Gordon University – March 16th and 17th

University of Aberdeen– March 23rd and 24th

It was decided, following previous Information Days, that March was the most suitable month as it allowed FE students to settle into their courses before investigating progression opportunities. The previous Information Days had been held in May 2002 and in March 2003.

3. DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION

In previous years information about and invitations to these days had been advertised within the Colleges. In addition, tutors had supplied to the project contact details of students planning to progress to university and these students had received ‘personal’ invitations. These arrangements had proven to be extremely time consuming and not very successful. It was therefore decided for the 2004 events that letters of invitation would be given to all HNC and HND students, so in total over 1300 letters were dispatched to firstly college contacts and then on to course tutors to distribute. Posters and information leaflets were also used to advertise the events. Dates were agreed with college contacts and included within the letters, so that students could confirm their intention to attend. Follow up information was sent only to those students. Despite all these efforts, applications were late being returned, so letters of confirmation were late being dispatched and numbers of attendees were disappointingly low.

i.e. **RGU** - Tues 16 March – 86 applied and 61 attended
 Wed 17 March – 58 applied and 32 attended

A total of 93 students from a possible 144 attended over the two days (65%) compared to 2003 when 67 from a possible 111 attended over the two days (60%).

U of A - Tues 23rd March – 25 applied and 10 attended
 Wed 24th March – 20 applied and 15 attended

A total of 25 students from a possible 48 attended over the two days (52%) compared to 2003, when 53 from a possible 110 attended over the two days (48%).

A cross-section of students who had applied to attend but failed to show were contacted and asked the question why they had decided not to come.

4. RESPONSES

Examples of typical responses to this question are:

- I decided to complete my HND first, and then look at University.
- I was happy with the visit to RGU, and decided that was the course I wanted, so I didn't visit U of A.
- The courses offered at both universities are similar, but RGU offer advanced entry to Yr 3, U of A does not.
- I forgot!

5. PROGRAMME

Following recommendations of previous years, programmes were compiled to include seeing the campus, visiting Departments/Schools, hearing about student life and meeting/chatting with current students.

Programmes of Information Days at RGU and U of A are attached.

6. STUDENT EVALUATIONS AND FEEDBACK

Of the 93 students attending RGU Information Days, 42 completed evaluation forms (45%).
Of the 25 students attending U of A Information Days, 19 completed evaluation forms (79%).

RGU In general the response was positive, with the students having enjoyed the day, and feeling the programme provided the information required. As always, there are a few minor amendments which can be built into the next programme. The poor scores relating to "Prior Information" were due to the problems caused by the late return of forms from the FE colleges, as mentioned previously.

UofA The programme for the visits met with the students approval until the Departmental Visits, when students visiting the Computing Dept. were told that advanced entry, to HND students, could not be offered as their course had not included JAVA. Students visiting the Psychology Dept, met a member of staff who lacked understanding and knowledge of current articulation agreements, and students progressing to university from an FE background. Both these issues have been reported to, and are being investigated by senior management of the university.

7. ISSUES RAISED

Issues raised by students during the Information Days have led to further investigation within the Universities.

- **Childcare** – as highlighted in previous years, problems relating to childcare continue to be a deterrent to some FE students. The cost of childcare provision is high, and places available to students are few. The "Mature Students Allowance" offers some assistance, but for many mature students progression to university still depends largely on support from family being available.
- **JAVA** – It is being queried whether this gap in knowledge can be filled by JAVA being offered in Summer School, or through the OScAR science programme.
- **Advanced entry** – lack of knowledge, by some staff, on current articulation agreements is a serious problem, which the project has attempted to address by co-ordinating Staff Liaison Meetings within different subject areas. Articulation agreements are currently being reviewed, and a lot of work is taking place at senior management level, thereafter it is proposed that an effective method of disseminating this information be identified to ensure all staff within the relevant colleges/schools are briefed.

- **Finance** - FE students considering progression to University, are very aware of the financial implications, and having used two years of SAAS funding achieving an HND, they will choose a course which offers advanced entry to Level 3 or at least Level 2, so as to best utilise their remaining 2 years of funding. The 2+2 course articulation agreements with RGU, ensures the most effective use of funding, and are favoured with FE students. It is the courses not offering these arrangements which involves the students "shopping around" for the best offer!

8. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE INFORMATION DAYS

- Hold UofA "Information Days" before those at RGU, to encourage students investigating courses offered by both institutions, to visit and compare the course provision.
- Target Yr 1 HND, HNC, Access and Higher students. Letters of invitation to be distributed by course tutors, who would be thoroughly briefed beforehand.
- March is still considered the best month to hold HE Information Days.
- FE Student "Flyer" - The flyer be produced for inclusion within the Induction Pack which is given to all new students registering at FE colleges. The flyer would clearly define what was being offered as:-
 - University Information Days – for students investigating possible articulation to a university course.
 - HE Familiarisation Course – for students definitely articulating to university that year.
 - These events do not duplicate what is offered by "2+2 subject visits", but provides additional information, valuable to articulating students.
- Use of Buddies - The feedback from visiting students, confirmed the value of using "Buddies". Both universities are currently undertaking to train Buddies to assist with the September Familiarisation Course, and to help as "Buddy Contacts" to FE students articulating to university in autumn 2004.

Morag Reid
Project Development Officer
May 2004

FE/HE TRANSITION PROJECT

HEI FAMILIARISATION EVENTS

University of Aberdeen – ‘Skills for Success in HE’ 14th, 15th, 16th September 2004

**The Robert Gordon University – ‘HE Orientation Programme’ 20th September 2004
Garthdee Campus, 21st September 2004 Schoolhill Campus**

1. BACKGROUND

These events were first run in 2003 for students progressing from Aberdeen College and Banff and Buchan College to either the University of Aberdeen (UofA) or the Robert Gordon University (RGU). It should be noted that events to familiarise FE students, particularly those engaged on 2+2 and 3+1 programmes, had been delivered at RGU prior to 2003, but RGU agreed to delay rolling out the programme to all advanced entry students and committed to developing this within the project, i.e. restricting invitations to students from the partner colleges only for the first year.

2. EVENTS IN 2003

In 2003 the RGU course ran over two days, with day 1 at the Schoolhill Campus and day 2 at the Garthdee Campus. A total of 108 students attended the two events, all of whom had advanced entry. The Project Development Officer contributed to the planning and delivery of the course at RGU and the project covered the costs incurred. The staff of the Centre for Student Access (CenSA) at RGU undertook the majority of the planning and delivery of the 2 days because of their access to and knowledge of the staff, venues, student applications etc.

At the UofA the HEI Familiarisation course ran over three days with 29 students attending, most of whom had gained advanced entry to level 2. The Project Development Officer had the major responsibility of planning and delivering the familiarisation course, with support from Centre for Lifelong Learning.

3. EVENTS IN 2004

In 2004, the two Universities ran these events more independently, to allow RGU to roll out to meet its strategic commitments and to tailor the programme for the large number of students entering the University directly from FE.

The 2004 HE Familiarisation event at RGU included :

- “Roll out” of the familiarisation event to all students with advanced entry, from all feeder FE colleges, not just from the two partner colleges within the project.
- Offering a one day introductory course, to students at each of the two campuses, with a series of “follow up” workshops (see Appendix 3) this strategy would deal effectively with the larger numbers, and avoid front loading the students with too much information.
- Induction to the Library and Computing Labs being offered through individual schools or through the programme of “follow-up workshops”.

The 2004 HE Familiarisation event at the UofA included:

- A repeat of the 2003 programme, with a few minor changes i.e. start times.
- Ensuring the student packs contained “back up” information on all the workshops, plus details of Support Workshops. In 2004 “Introduction to University Computing Systems” was not included in the 3 day programme, but was offered within the “Support Menu”.
- Support from Buddies throughout the 3 day programme.

3.1 Promotion of the events to potential attendees

Both Universities liaised with their Institutional Admissions department and RGU wrote directly to students with advanced entry from **all** feeder FE colleges.

UofA sent letters, initially, to students from the project partner colleges who had been offered a place and then sent a follow up letter in August, to 'firm students' from the partner colleges.

Throughout the year the partner colleges had displayed posters, dispensed leaflets and hosted talks, promoting the project and its activities to support FEC students through their transition to HEIs.

3.2 Pre-course information

Following receipt of an application for a place, students received written confirmation. Then two weeks prior to the start, applicants were sent information about the course and details of where and when to register, a provisional programme, a map and a consent form to comply with Data Protection.

3.3 Attendees

RGU 20 September 2004, Garthdee and 21st September 2004, Schoolhill

No. of invitations sent	184, 58
No. of acceptances	122, 35
No. who registered/attended	81, 27

A total of 108 students attended over the two days, i.e. 45% of invitees. However, it was appreciated that those from colleges further afield may have had difficulty attending, but could make use of the follow up workshops.

UofA September 14th, 15th, 16th 2004

No. of invitations sent	128
No. of acceptances	40
No. who registered/attended	36

A total of 36 students attended the three days, i.e. 29% of invitees.

3.4 Follow - up of non-attendees (U of A)

The four students who had accepted but did not attend, were contacted.

- One was working and couldn't take time off.
- One was ill.
- Two hadn't achieved the required entry qualifications.

3.5 Programmes

The programmes for the events at the 2 HEIs were very similar in content. They included topics such as learning styles and differences between Colleges and Universities, a treasure hunt to aid familiarisation with the campus, student expectations of University and the reality, opportunity to meet buddies, a question and answer session and practical advice about lectures and note taking and about plagiarism and referencing.

The programmes of the 2004 courses demonstrate clearly how these events have evolved into a format that could be delivered annually by the two Universities. It should be noted that a "Family Visit" was included in the UofA programme for the first time. This was not very well attended, but the staff involved felt it was a valuable addition, and should be repeated in future.

3.6 Overview of RGU “Orientation to HE Days”

Day 1 - 20th September 2004 – Garthdee Campus.

- As a high number of attendees were expected there were problems with finding suitable venues, and the programme was adapted to suit this with a combination of lecture theatres and break out groups.
- Students from certain subject areas/schools, did not arrive, as there was some confusion between this event, and the individual schools induction/orientation events.
- There was a good division of attending students to ‘groups’ (Scottish Loch names) and good allocation of Buddies to each group.
- A good Treasure Hunt was included in the programme. It involved planning, group discussion, division of tasks, plus a prize was awarded.
- Good use of Buddies throughout the programme.
- Good student packs/resources, which included information about the “follow up” Support Workshops offered by CenSA .
- As with the 2003 student feedback, it was apparent from talking to attending students that these events greatly boosted their overall confidence regarding the move to HE, this was confirmed through evaluation, by a 17% increase in confidence after attending the programme.
- The downside of such a large number of attendees was that it was difficult to establish contact, and quite a few left after lunch, and thereafter.
- Catering for such a large group was difficult, resulting in wastage.
- The content of the programme was very well received, with 79% of students rating it excellent/good.

Day 2 – 21st September 2004 – Schoolhill Campus

- The expected numbers were much lower, with 27 attending, and the ratio of male to female was much higher because of the subject areas involved.
- Interaction was much easier, with the smaller, generally older group.
- The Treasure Hunt was again good as it highlighted the challenge posed with finding your way between the various buildings which make up the Schoolhill Campus. It should be noted for future, that more time should be allowed for a Treasure Hunt at this venue.
- Catering was provided in the Student Union, and being a smaller group it encouraged good interaction.
- Approachability of staff, on both days, received good student feedback, with 100% rating excellent/good.

3.7 Overview of “Skills for Success in HE” – Sept 14th : 15th : 16th

University of Aberdeen

- The number of attending students (36) enabled the use of a variety of venues to deliver the programme, for future planning, early booking of venues is essential, especially if attendee numbers increase as expected.
- The Treasure Hunt proved a good “ice breaker”, but requires to be updated annually as some of the answers had changed.
- Buddies (who had attended the course in 2003) were used successfully throughout the three day programme, but in future could be used more effectively if duties were more clearly defined.
- When planning the Departmental Visits, insufficient time was allocated for the students to meet with their student guides, and make their way to the various venues.
- Following feedback from the 2003 course, and to restrict wastage, lunch vouchers were issued to all attending students and staff, which proved very successful and cost effective.
- Inclusion of 15-minute comfort breaks both am and pm improved the timekeeping of the group.

- Feed back from the students was positive, and indicated the programme increased their confidence, particularly with the more mature.
- Having the programme run over three days encouraged the group to gel and make new friends.

3.8 Student Evaluations

Overall the feedback from the students attending the events of both Universities was very good, and the areas requiring improvement or amendment were fairly minor, and could easily be absorbed into future programme planning.

A cross section of attendees from the 2003, UofA, 'Skills for Success in HE' course were contacted as a cohort group within a tracking exercise and all (apart from one who had to withdraw due to a health problem), were still registered as students and had settled well into University life. All stated that the 2003 course had benefited them by smoothing the transition between College and University (see Appendix 1 for more detailed information about the tracking of students involved in the project).

3.9 Buddies

Attendees of the 2003 course were asked if they would be prepared to become Buddies. At UofA, two of the existing pilot of three Buddies did attend the 2003 course, they then attended a Buddy Training Day and assisted with the 2004 event as Buddies to the incoming FE students. At RGU the Buddy Scheme had been piloted the year previously and Buddies had been in place throughout the year, as well as having a large input into the Familiarisation Days. From the 2004 attendees, future Buddies have been identified and will be followed up to hopefully be trained to become the next group of Buddies, plus being a cohort group to be tracked.

3.10 Feedback from staff and students involved in delivering the event at the UofA

- Library – As the library was still operating on the holiday timetable, problems were experienced with both access and egress of students. Problems relating to group sizes, and their wide-ranging subject areas caused difficulties with accessing and researching information. Also the time allowed for the library workshop was felt to be too short.
- Student Association (SA) – Reported that they would recommend a 'Student Forum' involving the Student Association, and allowing the students the opportunity of finding out about student life on a more 'one to one' basis. This would be considered for future programme planning, but would depend on the availability of SA.
- Departmental Staff - Would have appreciated more notice of expected student numbers and better timekeeping/punctuality on the day.
- Buddies – Enjoyed developing the contact with incoming students, but felt they could have had better defined duties.
- Careers Service – Had contact with students during the Treasure Hunt and have expressed a wish of more involvement in future events.
- Workshop Providers – Felt the time allowed for the Workshops should be lengthened, to enable more practical aspects to be introduced, also the students should be encouraged to move more quickly between venues!

4. FUTURE PLANNING OF HE FAMILIARISATION EVENTS

One of the main objectives of the FE/HE Transition Project was to provide development funding to assist the partner Universities to develop and deliver FEC/HEI Transition events. This objective has been achieved with the HE Familiarisation Courses and the events have evolved through the life of the project into a format that can be sustained by and delivered by the institutions. In addition, the programme has been tried and tested and both institutions can adapt the programme for future events to ensure that it meets their own needs and the needs of their potential students.

The conclusion of the project will mean the end of the financial support for costs incurred by the events, such as catering, travel, childcare, accommodation and the production of course resources and promotional materials. The individual institutions are confident that proactive planning and effective management (see para. 6 below) will minimise any negative effect and allow these events to become part of mainstream activity.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS/EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

The following examples of good practice from the courses offered at both RGU and UofA, are recommended to be included in future programmes:

- Extend time for library activity, and use the time, for example, to research plagiarism.
- Include a computing workshop to familiarise with University networks.
- Use representatives from the Student Association for a Student Forum, to provide a broader overview of University Life.
- Possibly include Career Planning.
- Use Buddies more effectively
 - As facilitators for Treasure Hunt.
 - Give them a designated group of students to work with.
- Split attendees into smaller 'named groups' with an assigned member of staff and a Buddy.
- Provide a prize for the Treasure Hunt.

6. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE DELIVERY OF FAMILIARISATION COURSES

The following suggestions again demonstrate existing good practises within both partner Universities.

- Consideration could be given to inviting all advanced entry students, and first year students where appropriate.
- Invite students from all FE "feeder" Colleges
- Consider delivering during Freshers' Week to:
 - Encourage/enable more to attend
 - Cut expenses
- Consider delivering in 'smaller chunks' as half day programmes or workshops, staggered throughout the week.
- Use specialist staff within Universities to deliver.
- Work with Departments/Schools to ideally have a contact person to work with throughout the whole of the FE student's transition programme, ideally a supporter of Widening Access.

Morag Reid
Project Development Officer
October 2004

FE/HE TRANSITION PROJECT

REPORT ON THE BUDDY SCHEME

1. BACKGROUND

Setting up and implementing a “Buddy Scheme” was a priority area of the FE/HE Transition Project and during 2003 The Robert Gordon University (RGU) introduced a pilot scheme. The buddies undertook a half-day training and then assisted with the 2003 Familiarisation Course and set up Buddy Schemes within their individual schools/departments. In 2004, within both Universities, a Buddy Scheme was established to provide an informal source of support to FE/HE Transition students.

2. SETTING UP THE SCHEMES

At both RGU and the University of Aberdeen (UofA) this was done by:

- identifying potential buddies by means of e-mail, posters, contact with various student associations,
- inviting interested students to attend a sandwich lunch, followed by a presentation on “Being a Buddy” with information leaflets about the scheme to take away,
- once students “signed up”, they attended a training session. The session gave an overview of the scheme and the reason that it was being set up and gave specific information about the role and responsibility of a buddy, communication, listening and counselling skills, sources of information, ongoing support for buddies and a question and answer session.

The training was delivered by staff from the Centre for Student Access (CenSA) at RGU and the Centre for Lifelong Learning (then called Key Learning) at the UofA. Between the two universities, the operation of the scheme differed. At RGU the buddies assisted with FE/HE events and within their respective schools they set up how the scheme would operate for the students, i.e. contacting; meeting, advising.

At UofA the Buddies assisted with the programme of FE/HE transition events and elected to work as one group, not just within their own schools or subjects. They manned a designated e-mail account and arranged and attended buddy “Open Sessions”. Both groups of buddies agreed that the most queries/questions/contact from FE transition students came within the first semester, as was anticipated, and then trailed off as the students settled in.

The Buddies were supported by staff from CenSA and Key Learning and they met together on a regular basis to discuss the scheme, raise any related queries, but most importantly, network together. As this was the second year the scheme had been operational at RGU, it was more widely known and the usage was higher than at UofA. Within both Universities the scheme was promoted to staff and students, but without doubt it will take time to become embedded into the University culture.

The Buddies were very positive about the scheme, stating it was a source of support that would have benefited them and they were very confident of its value and where it fitted into existing student support.

3. BUDDY MANUAL

Following the successful implementation of the scheme, it was decided to produce a “practical guide to setting up a Buddy Scheme” as one of the main outputs of the project. Through collaboration of staff at CenSA and Key Learning, the guide was written. It followed the stages already mentioned, but was written using the minimum of text, as a stage by stage practitioners’ manual. Following the principles of “wider participation” the booklet was designed and produced by Aberdeen Foyer. As well as a limited print-run of hard copies to “launch” at the Conference, the Training Manual is accessible electronically through the Forum website www.scotland-northforum.ac.uk/reports.

4. THE FUTURE OF THE BUDDY SCHEME

The buddy scheme will continue as part of the core work of the partner Universities and will possibly be expanded to “roll-out” to all FE student entrants, mature students and advanced entry students. The development of the Schemes can be regarded as a very successful output of the FE/HE Transition Project and it is something that other University Departments are enquiring about.

Morag Reid
Project Development Officer
January 2005

FE/HE TRANSITION PROJECT**REPORT ON THE 'SKILLS FOR SUCCESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION' CD ROM****1. Background**

Through the first two years of the project, the tracking of students from FECs to HEIs, and the feedback from students attending HE Familiarisation events meant that the main differences between study at HEI level compared to FEC level were identified. These differences were a concern to the students, who rightly or wrongly regarded them as obstacles to smooth transition from the College learning culture to University. A tutor who delivered Study Skills workshops submitted a proposal to develop the "storyboard" for a CD ROM with the following sections: - Introduction; Library; Lectures/Note-taking; Time Management; Essays; Grammar; Report Writing; Graphs and Tables; Exams; Motivation; Distance Learning; Public Speaking/Presentation skills.

2. Proposed Usage

Approximately 300,000 students enter Higher Education annually and the CD can provide valuable support to them as well as the FE/HE transition students. It can provide prior knowledge without commitment, in a more stimulating and fun way compared to a textbook.

3. Production

Bids were invited from three companies and the "youngest" one was successful, due to their innovative concept of the subject and their grasp of the potential market. The finished CD would be self-loading in macro media flash.

4. Budget

Storyboard Development - £1,000.
Design and Production of 1,000 CD ROMS - £6,000
(final total cost was £5,700)

5. Timescale

The contracts were agreed in April 2004 and a finish date of November 2004, with the conference date of 2nd December as the deadline for the finished CD ROM.

6. Distribution

"Skills for Success" CD ROMS were sent to:

- Project partners
- North Forum members
- FE Colleges
- HEIs
- Libraries
- Career Centres
- Other Regional Forums
- SWAP
- SUALL.

Also all attendees of the Conference were contacted regarding distribution of CD ROM within their institution/organisation.

7. Feedback received

The CD ROM was very well received, and additional copies were requested by many FE Colleges, plus one College requested permission (which was granted) to make it available electronically for all students to access. Careers Scotland requested as many copies as possible for advisers to use/give out to potential HE students. School libraries, throughout Aberdeen, also requested, and were sent copies for their HE section. The very positive feedback received, confirmed the value of the CD ROM within many areas of the wide education sector.

8. Conclusion

The “Skills for Success in Higher Education” CD ROM was an extremely positive outcome from the project and should enjoy a long shelf life and be an invaluable resource in many variable outlets.

Morag Reid
Project Development Officer
January 2005

FE/HE TRANSITION PROJECT

CONFERENCE REPORT – ‘SUPPORTING THE BRIDGE’ Held on 2nd December 2004

1. BACKGROUND

A total of 89 delegates from all over Scotland and covering the broad spectrum of education and widening participation, booked to attend the one day Conference “Supporting the Bridge” which was held on Thursday 2nd December 2004, in the Richard Donald Suite, Pittodrie Stadium, Aberdeen.

This was the closing event of the FE/HE Transition Project and followed two previous conferences “Making the Link”, January 2002 and “Forging the Link”, December 2002, which initially launched this project and thereafter disseminated the developments and outcomes of year one. The project was a partnership between Aberdeen College, Banff and Buchan College, The Robert Gordon University (RGU) University of Aberdeen (UofA). It was funded by the North Forum for Widening Participation in Higher Education (the North Forum), initially for one year and then funding was extended for a further two years. The aim of the project was to develop and embed mechanisms that would smooth transition between Further and Higher Education and work towards addressing the issues raised in the report “Credit Transfer at the FE/HE Interface” by MacLennan, Musselbrook and Dundas, November 2000.

The main aims of the conference were to:

- launch the two major outputs of the project:
 - The Buddy Training Manual and
 - The Skills for Success in HE, CD ROM
- disseminate the work and the other outcomes of the project, and
- discuss the progress made towards a smoother transition between FECs and HEIs nationally, and how this work could be continued

2. SPEAKERS

The speakers and workshop leaders were chosen to give a balance of FEC, HEI and widening access experience. Rob Wallen, Associate Principal, Aberdeen College, chaired the conference. Rob had close connections with the project through his position at Aberdeen College and his role as Vice Chair of the North Forum. The two keynote speakers were Margaret Dundas, National Co-ordinator for Widening Participation and Alex MacLennan, Principal, Ayr College, who were co-authors of the report, which was the starting point of the project.

2.1 Speaker profiles

Rob Wallen

Since 1991, Rob Wallen has worked at Aberdeen College, first as Head of QA and, from 1996, as Associate Principal. His particular responsibilities include curriculum development, student support services, support for additional learning needs, libraries, IT centres and e-learning.

Rob is a member of the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) Qualifications Committee and the Board of the Scottish Further Education Unit (SFEU). He is also a member of the Board of Aberdeen Foyer and a member of the national Beattie Resources for Inclusiveness in Technology and Education (BRITE) steering group.

He has been a member of the Executive of the North Forum since 2002, and became vice-chair in late 2003/04. He is editor of the recently initiated North Forum newsletter and chairs the SWAPNorth sub-group of the Forum. Along with the Chair and the Administrator of the North Forum he attends the national meetings of the chairs and vice chairs of the 4 regional forums.

Margaret Dundas

Margaret Dundas is the Scottish Funding Councils' National Coordinator for Widening Participation. This post supports the Scottish Executive's Lifelong Learning Strategy and involves working with the College and HEI sectors as well as the four Scottish Wider Access Regional Forums, student groups and a range of other agencies involved in education and training in Scotland. She also provides support for the recently formed Scottish Wider Access Regional Forums Group. This group pulls together the expertise of all 4 forums and provides national events at both strategic and practitioner level. The latter were formerly provided through the SNAP project (Scottish Network for Access and Participation).

The main objectives of her post are: to support/provide communication between and among managers, practitioners and agencies, advise on areas for new/continuing development and help prevent duplication of effort/funding as well as disseminating good practice in the field of widening participation. Margaret is a member of various national committees, including SQA's HN Key Partners Group, SACCA (Scottish Advisory Committee on Credit and Access) and the Executive's Professional Development Forum.

Professor Alex MacLennan

Alex MacLennan took up the post of Principal and Chief Executive of Ayr College in March this year after working in the Higher Education Sector for 19 years. He had previously held the post of Assistant Principal at the University of Paisley, where his range of responsibilities included Lifelong Learning, Social Inclusion, Corporate Communications, Widening Participation, and the FE/HE Interface.

Prior to that, Alex was Director of the University's Campus in Ayr, following three years as Director of Communications. Previously, he implemented and developed the highly successful Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS) at Paisley, and built-up the Department of Continuing Education from its inception.

Alex was Project Manager for the recently completed FE-HE Mapping, Tracking and Bridging Project, carried out under the auspices of the Scottish Advisory Committee on Credit and Access (SACCA) on behalf of the Scottish Funding Councils. He is currently a member of SACCA and the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Implementation Group.

Student Presenters

The two students who gave short presentations on the theme of "A Students' Perspective" were from the partner universities and linked strongly to the project and its work. **Celine** was a mature married student who had returned to education through an access course, FE qualification and direct entry to Year 2 at University. **Craig** gained his university entrance qualifications at school but chose full-time work and travel before commencing university. Both Celine and Craig had had involvement in various FE/HE project activities and both are currently "buddies". Their presentations were very well received and viewed by some as a high point of the conference.

3. WORKSHOPS

Delegates were asked to attend 3 workshops and were able to choose from a total of 6, all of which related to specific outcomes of the project and/or national initiatives that have impacted to FE/HE Transition.

There was 1 workshop during the morning session and 2 in the afternoon. They were time tabled for 45 minutes and each had a Leader and a scribe. There was a very high level of demand for the workshops on 'impact of FEC students on student support systems' and 'marketing and recruitment of FEC students to HEIs'.

The workshop leaders were briefed carefully, and asked to pose pertinent questions and to identify from the workshop issues to take forward, either by institutions or as matters to discuss with the North Forum.

Workshop A Developing a student buddy scheme

This workshop linked to the Buddy Training Manual and followed the RGU model.

- i.e.
- Aims and Objectives of a Buddy Scheme
 - Recruitment and Selection
 - Buddy Training
 - Running and Supporting Scheme

The workshop was then asked how the scheme could be adapted for individual institutions.

General Observation - To be successful a Buddy Scheme should be informal and voluntary.

Key points and questions raised:

- Should Buddies be faculty specific?
- Should Buddies be subject specific?
- A Buddy Scheme is valuable from both the College and University perspective, as it helps students relax and it builds confidence.
- Is age and gender an issue? should mature Buddies work with mature students? should female work with female?
- Could/should Buddies make contact with students whilst still at FEC?
- Should the Buddy Scheme be rolled out to all students?

Issues for the future:

- Would more students be attracted if Buddy Scheme was accredited? Could it be accredited?
- Could Buddy Scheme be adapted for use with P/T – distance students? Could parts of it be adapted for P7 moving to S1?
- A method of promoting/marketing the scheme to students, to recruit more Buddies?

Workshop B The Impact of FE Students on Student Support Systems

Question 1

- What are the challenges for Support Systems posed by the increasing numbers, and specific needs of direct entry students?

Challenges – suggested:

- Helping students adapt to new systems.
- Expectations of students, in terms of what support they expect should be provided – KEY ISSUE
- Resources available, particularly staff.
- Raising awareness of staff to specific needs of direct entry students.
- Support may need to be sustained through the year of entry.
- Cultural barriers/cultural changes.
- Bridging the gap – should more preparation be provided at FE stage?
- All types of support are required i.e. social : personal : academic – which can involve many agencies.

Implications of these challenges:

- Increased resources – to enable a more pro-active approach i.e. identifying students with problems before problems reach crisis point.
- Staff Development Issues – so staff are aware of the value and significance of student support – Funding implications?
- Being aware of the impact of Direct Entry Students on existing/established classes.
- Are the needs of FE students exclusive to them? – be careful not to provide support in such a way that other students feel disadvantaged.

Staffing issues:

- Do we need to refine the definition of support?
- How can perceptions be changed? – for example, how certain University staff regard FE students

For the future :

- Are numbers of FE students progressing to HE an anticipated growth area?
- Could Student Support issues be incorporated into a possible Bridging Course/Bridging Unit?

Question 2 (note little time was left for Question 2)

What kinds of support do you perceive students from FE need, upon entry to HE?

Points Raised :

- Are their needs generally the same as other groups? Should we be looking at different identifiers e.g. age : sex: rather than FE?
- Should we be looking at a range of needs common to different groups of people, such as mature students (confidence building?) and students with children (childcare issues?)
- The workshop agreed that FEC students do have specific support needs.
- The workshop agreed that “curriculum gaps” caused additional pressure on Student Support.

Recommended action:

- Curriculum Gaps should be addressed by Institutions, nationally, and with all possible haste.
- Support offered to FE students should be available to all students.
- Support should be available and offered at pre-entry stage.
- Could a generic training pack on “Supporting Students” be developed? (for Institutions to adapt)
- The value of the “Buddy Scheme” for Student Support departments should be recognised.

Workshop C Using a Study Skills CD ROM

The new “Skills for Success in HE” CD ROM, which is one of the main outputs of the project, was demonstrated to the workshop and feedback was requested on:

Usage:

- It was felt the CD would be more appropriate and have greater usage within FECs.
- Useful for HE induction courses.
- Useful for Careers advisers.
- At HE level it was useful as a generic aid/support tool.

Main points raised:

- It would have more use in HE if it were more subject specific.
- It could lead on to a second CD, which included links to websites : more detailed information : film footage : interviews with students.
- The CD would have benefited from including – more tasks : more examples : a summary following each section.

Less Positive Feedback

- Some found the background music irritating (it can be turned off!).
- FE students may not understand some of the language used – “credits”.

Overall

The CD ROM was very well received and was felt to be an extremely useful tool/aid for students planning to move, or moving to an HEI.

Workshop D Taking the National Bridging Project Forwards

A presentation was made on the work of the National Bridging Project. The conference had been informed that a “learner toolkit”, an output of the work, would be sent to HEI’s and FEC’s by Christmas. The question posed to the workshop was “How best can work towards seamless FE/HE Transition be continued?”

Suggestions

- Accreditation of a Bridging Course/Bridging Unit, and include it within HN curriculum – a point was raised, if accredited would it become a barrier?
- Promote Bridging work at regional level i.e. building of little, institution specific, bridges?
- Funding of a Co-ordinator, to collect and collate information about regional work/programmes and disseminate nationally through national organisations.
- Setting up a Bridging Forum/Bridging Family, so practitioners can meet, share and disseminate models of good practice.
- Query : could these models be used for transition between Primary – Secondary or Secondary – FE/HE?
- Conduct an evaluation of the Impact/Effectiveness of Bridging work on FE/HE Transition.
- Develop training sessions on Bridging/How to advise on Bridging, for staff involved in preparing pupils/students i.e. Careers Scotland etc.
- Training being developed at regional level would require information on what available, where it was available and contact details.

Workshop E Taking the National Tracking Project Forwards

The workshop discussed:

- Why track? Different agencies have different objectives/reasons i.e. Secondary Education, Further Education, Higher Education and each agency has differing requirements regarding data/fields/adaptations/ information. Tracking information is collected and analysed nationally by HESA and UCAS and locally within FECs and HE (registry, faculties, depts.)
- Discussion continued to how tracking can be undertaken and yet still comply with Data Protection?

Suggested ways forward:

- Use of Scottish Candidate Number.
- National “Lifelong Learner Identifier” Number – could National Insurance number be used?
- For these to be effective means of tracking, appropriate fields would have to be added to all relevant forms/records.
- Establishing a quick, reliable and effective means of tracking should be a priority locally, regionally and nationally.

Workshop F Marketing and Recruiting of FE students to HE

Observations

- When should marketing start and stop?
- Are happy students the most effective marketing tool?
- If marketing is effective will recruitment follow?

Marketing Methods

As FE students have already chosen education, HE can be marketed to them in a variety of ways.

Direct Marketing

- HE talks in FE Colleges/to FE classes.
- FE students attending an HE Career Event.
- FE students attending Information Days; Taster Days; Open Days; Adult Learner's Events.

Indirect Marketing

- Prospectus; Course Catalogues
- Press Releases
- Website Information
- Posters
- Institution Led/Institution based Articulation agreements

4. CONCLUSION

The range and number of delegates from across Scotland was a clear indication of interest and involvement in FE/HE Transition issues, from within Further and Higher Education and the Education sector in general.

Feedback on the conference was on the whole very positive, with the less encouraging observations mostly relating to the venue and catering, and these comments have been passed to the company concerned. The aims of this event, at the conclusion of the project, were to attempt to pull together its main activities, to look at progress made, and how these activities have linked and embedded. Two products of the project were launched at the Conference and were very favourably received. The Buddy Training Manual was presented in hard copy, and a few remaining copies are still available. The manual is available in .pdf format to view or to download from the North Forum website www.scotland-northforum.ac.uk/reports.

The CD ROM "Skills for Success in HE" was also launched very favourably, with delegates receiving "first run copies" in their folders. The final "boxed version" will be sent out to Student Support Departments. in FECs and HEIs. Copies will also be sent to Careers Scotland bases, libraries and other interested agencies.

In conclusion, this event provided an opportunity for practitioners and policy and decision makers in FE and HE to meet and network, raising further issues and possible future developments or work.

Morag Reid
Project Development Officer
January 2005

**THE NORTH FORUM FOR WIDENING PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION
MEMBERSHIP AS AT JULY 2005**

In alphabetical order of institution

INSTITUTION/ORGANISATION	REPRESENTATIVE
Aberdeen City Council	Pete Hamilton Community Learning and Development Manager
Aberdeen College	Rob Wallen (Vice Chair) Associate Principal
Aberdeenshire Council	Anne Simpson Community Learning Manager
Banff & Buchan College	Gordon Scott External Affairs Manager
Careers Scotland (Highlands and Islands Enterprise Area) and Highlands and Islands Enterprise	Liz Galashan Head of Services to Individuals
Careers Scotland (Grampian Enterprise Area)	Moira F. Whyte Functional Manager
Highland Theological College	Kevin Sinclair Learning Centre Development Manager
Inverness College	Frances Hunter Assistant Principal (Academic)
LEAD Scotland	Jennifer Third Regional Manager, North
Lews Castle College	Iain Macsween Section Manager, Gaelic, Communications, Arts and Languages
Lochaber College	Dan MacLeod Principal
Moray College	Greg Cooper Director, Student and Client Services
North Atlantic Fisheries College	Peter Dryburgh Principal
North Forum*	Alison Watson Administrator
Orkney College	Bill Ross Principal
Sabhal Mor Ostaig	John Norman MacLeod Head of Studies
Scottish Agricultural College	Hannah Jones Student Recruitment Officer
Scottish Funding Councils*	Margaret Dundas National Co-ordinator for Widening Participation
Scottish Funding Councils*	Dr John Kemp Assistant Director
Shetland College	Prof. John McClatchey Director
The Highland Council	Graham Watson Culture and Sport Manager
The North Highland College	Rosemary Thompson Principal
The Open University in Scotland	Dr Lindsay Hewitt Widening Participation Co-ordinator
The Robert Gordon University	Prof. John Harper (Chair) Vice Principal, Faculty of Health & Social Care
UHI Millennium Institute	Iain Morrison Widening Participation Manager
University for Children and Communities	Maggie McGougan Convenor
University of Aberdeen	Julie McAndrews Director, Centre for Lifelong Learning
WEA	Alison Morrison Tutor Organiser

* Observer status