communications
feedback
development
achievement
academic
community
mentoring
guidance
expectations
skills
Induction
prospective
differences
and
experience
Transition
challenges
belonging
Good
support
opportunities
culture
Practice
holistic
meaningful
individuality
diversity
Guide
students
partnership
understanding
engagement

Induction and Transition into On-line Distance Learning Programmes

Induction and Transition into Online Distance Learning Programmes

Student view from the Interdisciplinary Applied Research Ethics Centre

The most important positive point mentioned by the students regarded the flexibility of the course and our awareness of the issues faced by mature online students. Since most of our students are professionals with busy careers, we make sure that we schedule everything in advance and provide them with clear timetables allowing them to can arrange their work to accommodate the course. We are also flexible about extensions and recognise the fact that most of our students have families and professional jobs which are their priority. In this sense we make the transition easier by making sure that our students can continue their professional and family lives with minimal interference.

The main challenge raised was lack of personal contact with tutors and other students. Since most of our students have done campus degrees before, they remember the social life aspect of their studies. Online degrees offer much less of an opportunity to see the other people on the course, and make the students feel more isolated.

In light of student feedback the **following recommendations** are suggested to enhance the support for students transitioning to open, distance learning programmes:

- Design online courses bearing in mind that many online students are adults with families and careers. This means adopting a flexible approach to teaching and assessment, scheduling in advance, and making sure that the support documents and services offered are not simply a copy of what is offered to young campus students.
- Encourage more direct interaction between students and between students and tutors (eg encourage informal group use of social media, arrange webinars, etc.)
- Manage expectations regarding personal contact – it will never be possible to provide open, distance learning students with the level of contact they remember from their campus degrees, if only because scheduling anything with a group of people who all live in different time zones is very hard.

- Modify Leeds for Life in a way which acknowledges the needs of mature open, distance students, or exempt those students from using it.

Resources

Simpson, O. 2003. *Student Retention in Online, Open and Distance Learning* London: Kogan Page

Simpson, O. 2002. *Supporting Students in Online, Open and Distance Learning.* London: Kogan Page