

NEON Working Group South

Access and outreach for disabled learners

Tuesday, 28 November 2017 12:30- 15.30pm

Host: Oxford Brookes University

Attendees

Charlotte Beaumont-Oates - Chair
Sasha Leek, Bucks New University
Lynda Witby-Eastwood, Sussex University
Stephen Petty – Portsmouth University
Maureen O'Brien - Bucks New University
Nargis Tailor - UCL
Chris Wilson - BPP
Vivienne Coombes - Brookes
Gill Shrieir - Brookes
Tamsin Crabb - Brookes
Trudy Ing - Brookes
Hellen Barton - Brookes

Apologies:

Kevin McMullan

1. Welcome and introductions

CBO welcomed everyone and explained that this group is a spin-off of the Neon Working Group North and that the aim is to give a voice to southern universities. Terms of Reference for the working group were agreed.

ACTION: CBO to update date and contact details on Terms of Reference

2. Minutes from the last meeting (17th February 2017)

Minutes of the last meeting were circulated for reference.

3. Update on changes to DSA/Student Finance – TC on behalf of KM

Kevin McMullan was unable to attend and sent his apologies. His update was circulated and key points discussed by TC. Questions raised were for example the reason why a number of students aren't using DSA allowance after being offered it (14 %) and the discrepancy between DSA applications forecasted and applications received. The group also discussed the benefits of the new online application system. Students still have to print out a sheet to be signed and medical evidence is sent in later. It is suggested that currently paper application are quicker, as medical evidence gets attached straightaway. Question for Kevin: How much of a delay does in processing the later attachment of medical evidence in online applications?

ACTIONS:

- **Everyone** to go through DSA stakeholder update and to send questions for Kevin to CBO.
- **CBO** to pass on questions to Kevin and to distribute answers next meeting.

4. Discussion – Best practice surrounding transition

4.a ‘Get set for Uni’ –GS

GS gave overview over ‘Get set for Uni’ transition programme for students suffering from mental health problems. Participants took part in a presentation on the support available, followed by a workshop. On a Kuebler-Ross Change curve (see hand-out), they mapped the changes they experienced from before starting uni, to moving into halls to first weeks semester and made predictions for semester 1 and 2. The workshop included drama elements, such as writing a script for YouTube clips. It was important to help students understand that coming to terms with new situation is a process and that they can feel ambivalent about coming to university. Also about normalising anxiety and being able to anticipate feeling anxious.

Can a workshop like this replace 1-2-1? Probably not, because students with mental health problems may struggle with group situations, as the fairly low turnout showed. Solution: Workshop written up as self-help online resource. Facilitation also needs to consider students not knowing each other.

Discussions:

Schools & transition: A discussion arose around how much mental health and transition support schools and colleges offer. There seems to be an increased interest from schools. CBO is looking into developing an offer for schools to connect transition offers. Was asked by partner school to support students who were struggling with anxiety and used MIND [‘How to cope with being a student’](#) resource. Bucks offer pre-application workshop for Y13’s which includes them talking about their worries and expectations. Student ambassadors were important for the success of the workshop.

The question arose if there should be transition workshops on Open Day to give an overview over pastoral care available. LWE: Sussex offer successful transition workshop during applicant days which are subject-specific and delivered by student ambassadors.

Parents

There was a discussion on how to support parents of disabled children. Winchester did ‘top tips’ for parents of disabled children, Brookes invites parents for a session during a residential for students on the autistic spectrum. It was commented that the more parents feel informed about support available the easier it is for them to support from outside and let children self-advocate.

Students:

There was a discussion on how to support disabled learners pre-application. Brookes offer a residential for students on the autistic spectrum in August. Aim is to familiarise people with environment and prepare for dates like fresher’s week and moving into halls. Gap around independent living skills and organisational skills or using emails. Brookes may introduce dedicated support workers next year to provide support at short notice to help establish routine.

Brookes also offer transition mentoring for students from WP background. Disabled students matched up with students who have similar disability.

BPP have many Mature students due to conversion courses and only recently introduced UG qualifications. Keen to work on new pastoral care offers. LWE: Sussex offer popular mature student information session, for students who may be many years out of education and may need confidence-building. Bucks offer Open Day talks specifically for mature students. UCL offer off-campus mentoring schemes for students who don’t live in halls.

4. b Oxford Brooke University's transition programme - HB

The transition team wish to be as inclusive as possible. Remit includes pre-arrival information, transitions and induction. They facilitate and connect existing work, e.g. the work of faculties or counselling team. There is an institutional commitment to work with disabled students and a project on as web portal on supporting students' inclusive learning.

Mentoring: Pilot_on-going mentoring after enrolment from next year onwards. This will be a change from pre-arrival mentoring and a shift away from applications support and also face-to-face on and campus. There's a need to understand student engagement.

Arrival: Disabled student advisors identify students who need support during arrival and enrolment. Between 40-50 students are identified (the majority with mental health issues). These students can use drop-in area instead of main enrolment at Student Central. The area is in the same building, but screened off from main enrolment area and disabled students are scheduled in, but everyone can use it if necessary. This means they can access whole programme like other students plus safety net underneath, as everything will be sorted in one place and which reduces stress. The team can ensure that the enrolment process goes well and flag them up to support teams at faculty level. Issues: Not everyone in need of support can be identified beforehand and ideally more support after enrolment could be offered.

3 key issues disabled students face during transition:

- Support and friendship networks, pressure to meet friends
- Sensory overload
- Changes in timetabling vs students' need for a fixed timetable

Discussions:

Disabled student groups: A discussion arose around the challenges of creating more proactive disabled student groups. SU's are not successful facilitators due to staff fluctuation. At Brookes, a member of staff facilitates groups and passes on results to committees etc. There was an agreement that as students don't necessarily identify as disabled and disabled students are very diverse, these groups should be promoted around themes and issues.

Special measures in place for disabled students? LEW: Appointments before fresher's week with adviser, tour of uni, then join everyone else for enrolment. SP: Work more closely with key contacts in schools who work on transitions. Also pilot mentoring scheme: upskilling current mentors to advise on additional support. Support transition into independent learning and less staff contact. Looking into using technologies like notetaker to reduce triggers for anxiety.

5. National Updates

Mailing list suggestions

-[Action on Access](#) mailing list.

ACTION : everyone to share mailing list suggestions for next meeting

6. Recent/upcoming conferences

Manchester minutes – attach minutes of their meeting. CBO to attend in February.

- Conference run by de Montford in Sheffield HB to feedback and share best practice.

Upcoming: [Preparing Students for HE and supporting them through the transition](#) on 31 January Westminster briefing. Action: HB to feed back next meeting

ACTION:

- **CBO** to share minutes of Manchester NEON group
- **HB** to feed back from conference and share best practice at next meeting

7. Anything to share:

N: 'Bring your family event' for secondary students and parents to help parents with transition and showcase how uni is different from school or college.

LWE: Increase in disabled visitors making contact before Open Days. Helpful to have information as it improves their day. Problem being told last minute of needs, such as signer for talks. HB suggests reactive approach: All presentations are signed. Chance support available. TC suggested [Deaf Student Solutions](#) for signers.

TC: Increase of requests of needs assessors for secure disabled student parking, echoed by others in group.

CW: Working on making materials for visually impaired or blind long-distance learners accessible. LBGT group doing well, disability group issues with disclosure, perhaps due to being, don't wish to go through reasonable adjustments for fear of their firms finding out. Calls for group being informal, but potential issues on bullying etc. need to raise awareness.

Steve: Encourage disclosure for international students, new ways to help get support transition into HE. Leaflet for service, to be more obvious and less text.

MO: Well-being ran series of pop-up cafes to build resilience around trigger points like winter or exams. Using 'Big White Wall' confidential help line to tackle mental health issues in more positive way.

ACTION:

CBO to share 'Settling In' leaflet

8. AOB

Agree themes for future meetings:

- GDPR – new data protection, impact on sharing support requirements for disabled
- Parent engagement – managing expectations

ACTIONS:

-**CBO** to send round google doc re themes

-**Everyone** to suggest themes

-**Everyone** to pass on invitations to other interested parties to increase membership of group and think about sub groups they wish to form (e.g. working with DSA)

-**Everyone** to let CBO know if they can host meetings

9. Date of next meeting

Meetings will be held three times a year, with the next being meeting end of February 2018.

ACTION: CBO to send Doodle poll