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Welcoming International Students: Transitions into Scottish Higher Education

Abstract:

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The topic of international students' transitions has been high on the Higher Education (HE) agenda in recent years. Indeed, international students are a main economic driver for HE Institutions (HEI) (Quan et al. 2016; Wu and Hammond 2011), especially in the United Kingdom. However, learning across cultures and languages create additional challenges for international students, so that their initial transition into UK HE is more difficult than home students (ibid.; Foster, 2011). In fact, international students are confronted by a number of specific challenges, among which language proficiency, academic background and social integration (ibid.).

Therefore, there is a need to be aware of the difficulties encountered by our international students, and provide high-quality sources of help, delivered to them in a timely fashion (Quan et al. 2016). Over the years a number of mechanisms set up to ensure effective support for international student transitions have been developed across the UK HEIs (Foster, 2012). However, as the demand for the international education has grown rapidly, the number and types of support has developed quickly in many universities, often leading to a proliferation of support, not entirely clear for the students and not always accounting for the many pathways the students enter the universities or the specific challenges faced by students from different countries of origin (Ryan 2012).

The session introduces the QAA funded university-wide international students transition scoping project conducted at Edinburgh Napier University. The project investigates practices supporting international students' transition onto programmes. This research project explores and maps the entirety of practices available at Edinburgh Napier University to support international students' transition, with a particular focus on identification of best-practices, duplications and gaps in provision and terminology to supporting international students' effective transition at Edinburgh Napier University.

The session aims to present the rationale behind the university-wide scoping methodology as well as guidelines to allow for replication of the study. Our findings highlight the need for the development of a comprehensive approach to transitions at institutional level for international students, widening access students and students returning to education, with a particular focus on student engagement.

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