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Student perspectives on the Associate Student Project, supporting direct entrants.

Abstract:

The Associate Student Scheme was introduced by the Scottish Funding Council in 2013 with a remit to improve the transition from college (further education institute/FEI) to university for direct entrant students—i.e. to improve the students' experience and outcomes. Studying an HND at college and then entering directly into second or third year of a university degree programme is a key way to widen access to university, but involves challenges for students and staff. The Associate Student Scheme aims to build partnerships between FEIs and universities; to map the curriculum between college and university programmes and align teaching and assessment methods; to address gaps in provision; and to embed core academic skills (SFC, 2013). The Associate Student Project within the School of Computing, now in its fourth year, provides a range of interventions to support direct entrant students, from their first year at college to their final year at university. In this session we will share details of our transition programme which in the latest academic year alone saw over 250 students join 16 programmes across the school. We will focus on student perceptions, gathered through surveys, focus groups, and the active participation of student interns. Students will share their stories and insights, their perceptions, problems and experiences. The session will discuss the mechanisms put in place for enhancing the transition from college to university not only for associate students but for direct entrants in general and will be of interest to colleagues across other schools.

Widening participation is a key directive for Edinburgh Napier University and is aligned with the Scottish Government's goal to reduce the participation gap between students from the most and least advantaged areas; this gap is currently greater in Scotland than the rest of the UK (Access in Scotland, 2016). FEIs are important recruiters in this agenda. Direct entry schemes offer students a direct route for continued study from HND to degree programme. This model of delivery, a 2+2 model (SFC, 2013), is underpinned by the Scottish Credit Qualifications Framework (SCQF). Students study for two years at college, followed by two years at university with no loss of time or repeat of study at the same level. However, the transition from college into second or third year at university can be difficult in all sorts of ways and direct entrants are vulnerable to drop out or under performance. The Associate Student Project aims to support these students, and to investigate and evaluate this support, prioritising student perspectives.

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